

NEW SKETE

WISHING YOU THE BLESSINGS AND JOY OF THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON

No. 14 Winter 2009/10



MISSION:

Our vocation as Eastern Orthodox monastics, united in interactive communities of monks, nuns and married couples, is to grow in the likeness of Christ through a vowed life and to embody and express Christ's love and message for all seekers in a manner responsive to contemporary needs and faithful to the prophetic spirit of the earliest Christian communities.

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The Founding Nuns: *Front row: Patricia, Mary, Diane, Back Row: Joan, Rita, Anne, Cecelia*

Feast of the Icon of
Our Lady of the Sign



Nuns' 40th Anniversary

By SISTER MACRINA



Today... *From left: Sisters Sarah, Rebecca, Cecelia, Macrina and Patricia .*

Not shown here: Sisters Rachel and Rita

On the last Sunday in October the communities celebrated the feast of Our Lady of the Sign, patronal feast for the Nuns of New Skete, 2009 marking the fortieth anniversary of our founding. At the luncheon hosted by the Chapel Community, the celebration highlighted a historical overview in a

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SERVICES:

All of our church services are open to the public.

DIVINE LITURGY

Sunday 10 AM
preceded by Matins
in Holy Wisdom
Temple at the Monks

VESPERS 5 PM

Tuesday through Saturday
in Holy Wisdom Temple

WEEKDAY MATINS 7:15 AM

Tuesday through Friday
at both the Monks and
at the Nuns

SATURDAY MATINS 8 AM
in Holy Wisdom Temple

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digital slide show presentation.

The changes urged by the II Vatican Council were sufficient to motivate seven sisters in the cloistered monastery of the Evansville Poor Clares to venture forth to put the changes into practice. In 1968 two sisters left to stay with a Poor Clare community in New Orleans, allowing them to explore other communities. In April 1969 three other sisters joined them. In an ongoing correspondence a Poor Clare Nun and a New Skete Monk had been exploring their understanding and visions of a contemporary contemplative religious life. The invitation from the monk to come and see resulted in a visit in June, 1969. Inspired by our experiences of several weeks at New Skete, we voted to establish a community near Cambridge, New York. The five of us arrived on August 17th with two more sisters from the Poor Clares coming in September to join in the founding. Thinking that two new communities in the small village of Cambridge would be impractical, we looked at property around Albany and the surrounding area, but none offered what we were seeking.

When a property on Ash Grove Road became available, and needing to vacate the monk's guest quarters, we settled on the Ash Grove house.

Our vision was to establish a contemplative community firmly rooted in the essence of monastic life. The desire was to celebrate the beauty and goodness of creation, to share more intimate relationships than experienced in the larger institutional orders, and to deepen and enrich our knowledge and understanding of God. That vision continues to inspire and challenge our daily life. When the sisters left their Poor Clare monastery, each was given a \$100.00. With only our vision and support of friends and family, the founding sisters approached the challenges of each day as it came and acquired skills to develop the monastery complex as it exists today. Our Franciscan spirituality in dialogue with the Eastern rite Franciscan monks resulted in our changing our name from Sisters of Saint Clare to the Nuns

To view the slide presentation in pdf format go to www.newskete.com/nuns.html and click on "about us"



Cindy and Isaac Labish enjoy brunch with Sister Rachel and Vera Beecroft.

of New Skete in 1974. In 1979 the communities embraced the newly established Orthodox Church of America.

Over the forty years the size of community has been relatively constant, at the largest there were thirteen sisters. Currently there are seven sisters with two living in a nursing facility in Saratoga Springs. Over this past year, the community has been working with strategic planning engaging in thorough analysis and, more importantly, reaffirming our intentions as a contemplative community. Out of those discussions has come a deeper commitment to our monastic life. One of the early questions in the strategic planning had to do with what we viewed as the optimal number of sisters. The clear consensus was the importance of the small group of eight to twelve that allows for intimacy and a sense of being companions together on the way. Another question had to do with what was the source of joy in our life. Some of the reflections of the sisters can be found in the panel to the right.

Certainly not all of the forty years have been joy-filled. Life in monastic community has been characterized as turning up the burner and there have been times of boiling over, burnt pans, etc., just as there has been that delightful dish that needed the high temperature. Yet at



Guests with Sister Patricia during 40th anniversary brunch.

the heart there is a joyfulness that has taken deep root in the Monastery of Our Lady of the Sign. Each time we drive up our driveway we encounter again the Theotokos, arms lifted in prayer showing forth the way of Christ, greeting us, welcoming us home; indeed, showing the way to our true home, abiding in Christ.

Rowan Williams, in his book, *Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin*, had this reflection on Our Lady of the Sign:

"Mary opens her hands to God in prayer, but her eyes are open to the world. It is not a bad image for our praying. We look without illusion or self-protection at the world, its pain, delight, hunger, grief, hope and all that informs, shapes our prayer. Praying is not necessarily best described always as looking towards God; sometimes, and especially in intercession, it is equally a learning to look at the world as if with God's eyes."

These words equally describe our monastic life. Just as we pray for the world, we strive to see Christ in our sisters and brothers, day in and day out, year after year. "To see with the eyes of the dove," [Gregory of Nyssa] demands the conversion of heart that is our daily work. The Theotokos of the Sign remains for us an awesome reminder of who we have been called to be as the Nuns of New Skete. ■

OUR GREATEST JOY

There is a sense of family... of belonging to a Christian community with people of basic integrity, honesty and women that are also searching with me for a closer relationship with God.

Liturgy, prayer life, shared with others of like mind and purpose.

True joy for me is the liturgy. That is where the three communities come together to offer our prayers on behalf of the world. I am still touched being in the choir, seeing others descend into depths of silence and prayer... such joy!

I love to sing... you know when you sing you pray twice.

Everything about the life I value. I enjoy the variety no matter what I am doing.

An Enduring Collaboration:

Henry Bates & the Nuns of New Skete



Henry Bates during a visit to the Nuns of New Skete.

By SISTER PATRICIA

Forty years ago on their travel back to Cambridge, the founding sisters picked up an old freezer in Connecticut. The monks advised them not to use it until the Freon levels were checked and replaced. They requested Henry Bates to do the work; as it turned out it was as simple as plugging in the freezer. So it was that Henry entered the life of the sisters and began a relationship that remains to the present:

that of a trusted advisor and our primary mechanical, electrical and plumbing consultant.

A native of Cambridge, he has worked in the surrounding communities for over sixty years, including serving as fire chief for the village and as head of maintenance at Mary McClellan Hospital. Beyond his skills in all things mechanical, he has been a significant link for us to the people of the community. Henry has been involved in the planning, designing, building and maintaining the bakery's compressors and venting system. It was with Henry's help that we were able to obtain well-respected George Gilchrist as the contractor for building the bakery and the new wing of the monastery.

His practical wisdom and generosity of time and availability has been a gift beyond measure to the community. When one of the furnaces goes off in the middle of the night, Henry has been there to do what was necessary. On his regular trips to the monastery to drop off yesterday's paper for us, he quietly makes his inspection rounds to insure the smooth efficient running of the monastery complex.

In celebrating our fortieth anniversary, we acknowledge with great gratitude Henry, our friend and advisor, who, indeed, is a significant person in the history of the Nuns of New Skete. ■

His practical
wisdom and
generosity of time
and availability has
been a gift beyond
measure to the
community.



Years ago researching the special texts used in the funeral for monks in the Orthodox liturgical tradition, one stands out in my mind because the hymn spoke with the voice of the temple itself saying how it would miss the brother or sister's sweet psalmody echoing in its vaults. I think Holy Wisdom here at New Skete, were it given a tongue, would have sung at Nadya's funeral about how beautifully it was adorned year after year throughout the growing season when she would make stunning flower arrangements, one in the center at the ambo behind the lectern, often five feet tall, always in complimentary or contrasting colors depending on what was in bloom. They were elegant and graceful, a fitting accent for the words of

Sacred Scripture proclaimed there. She arranged another next to the icon in the narthex alongside the patronal or festal icon, which worshipers kiss on entering. When I was working in the church on Saturdays, I would note how they would catch the eye of visitors who came and went, many going up to touch and admire them close at hand.

Robin Hetko has now stepped in to beautify the church each summer weekend, sometimes with garden contribution from other friends. She is shown here (right) at Dormition with her mentor Nadya Goldsmith and a floral creation before Nadya's death this past summer.

— BROTHER STAVROS

Once, there was a beggar, who had been begging along a city street for many, many years. Every day he would sit on a wooden box and beg from whomever passed by.

One day as a man passed by the beggar put out his dish and said, "Spare some change?" The man stopped and said, "I don't have anything to give you." But then he added, "But what's that you're sitting on?"

"Oh, just an old wooden box," the beggar replied.

"I've been using it for ages." "Ever look inside it?" the man asked.

"No," said the beggar. "It's just an old box that's been here ever since I started begging here. There's nothing in it."

"Take a look inside," the man said persistently, but the beggar didn't see the use. However, the more the beggar demurred, the more the man encouraged, until finally, just to placate him, the beggar agreed to look. As he pried open the top of the lid, his expression turned to astonishment, wonder and delight. The box was filled with gold.

— ANTHONY DE MELLO, SJ

TOUCHING GOD

"BUT JESUS SAID, 'SOMEBODY TOUCHED ME. I FELT THAT POWER HAD GONE OUT FROM ME.' ..." [LK 8:46]

By BROTHER CHRISTOPHER

In this Gospel story touch is central, and we see its spiritual dimension revealed in both stories: Jesus' touch of Jairus' daughter, raising her from death to life, and the ailing woman's touch of Jesus, in which she was healed by simply touching the tassel of his cloak.

In both stories touch releases the healing power of Jesus. Now while it's reasonable to suppose that both these stories stem from actual events in the ministry of Jesus, what interests me more than their simple historicity is how they come to life in our own lives, in our own search for God. How do we "touch God" anyway? Is it even possible? Because it stems from the woman's desire to touch Jesus, I'd like to reflect for a few moments on her story, and what it might have to teach us about touching God.

First, it is interesting to note that physical proxim-

ity has nothing to do with real "touching". In the story Jesus is surrounded by a crowd that presses in on him, almost suffocating him, yet they do not "touch" him. It is only the woman, who in faith reaches out to him, only she touches him. "Someone touched me," Jesus says. The touch he's speaking of here is always personal, always intentional, the kind that elicits his power because its origin is faith.

Fortunately, Jesus never settles for an anonymous relationship: Jesus calls each of us out into the open, challenging our faith and getting us to be honest, allowing ourselves to be known as we really are.

I find it easy to identify with the woman: her reticence in approaching Jesus directly due to her ritual impurity, the fear and shame she has lived with for years that have marginalized her from the community and from herself. So often with ourselves is it not fear, shame, and guilt that have made us wary of approaching God, wary of making ourselves transparent and vulnerable to God's presence because we know that God would have every legitimate reason to reject us due to our imperfection,

our sinfulness? Thus how easy it is to hang back, taking refuge in anonymity yet all the same stretching out our hand as it were towards Jesus, hoping that the slightest brush will heal our divided soul. We long to be healed – to be in relationship – but we're afraid.

Fortunately, Jesus never settles for an anonymous relationship: Jesus calls each of us out into the open, challenging our faith and getting us to be honest, allowing ourselves to be known as we really are. Only when we risk that



Brother Christopher

sort of transparency does true healing take place, the kind of healing that transforms each of us from within and allows us to live in a peace that stems from God's acceptance of us.

For the Risen Christ is present with each of us: in each of our hearts, as well as in the length and breadth of all our relationships. Indeed, even were we to take wing with the dawn and rest on the furthest horizon, as the psalmist says, even there the Risen Christ would be right beside us, coaxing from us what little faith we possess. That little faith, that speck we can take no pride in whatsoever, that faith is what allows us to touch God, and in the touch, to know ourselves to be accepted as we are by a love we cannot begin to comprehend. We've been sitting on it for the longest time. May our faith claim it. This is gold beyond our wildest dreams. ■

Three speeds South:
Jet-like humming birds, bomber geese,
And stunt-plane butterflies.

■ ■ ■

It does its tiny part
In Fall's costume ball:
The orange salamander.

Moon-lit maples:
All this cold pallid light
dulls their fiery hue to embers.

■ ■ ■

The oak this November morning,
Its leaves rust brown,
Cuts a white shadow in the grass.

■ ■ ■

Lost in thought,
Treading on rain-soaked leaves,
A buck, two doe and I converge.

Rockettes of the sky,
Undulating iccapettes:
Geese going south.

■ ■ ■

A handsome stag surprised
On the rocky slope:
My dog too stunned to chase.

■ ■ ■

SOME VERBAL DIM SUM

By BROTHER STAVROS



Goodness Lived

A little reflection on my mother

By SISTER MELANIE

I have always felt that if I have any goodness within me it is because of my mother. It is not something that I worked for; rather, it was a gift of love that was always present in her - not because of her encouragement to my brother and sister and me to always be good, but because of her own inherent goodness, which overflowed.

This little anecdote will show you an example of the way she lived and thought about life. After my father died, she and a friend decided to go on a bus trip to Boston to attend the annual flower show. They carefully calculated their expenses, making sure they would have money for the bus, attendance at the show, having a good dinner and staying overnight in a hotel before the return trip the next day.

They had a nice trip on the way over, catching up on all of the news about their friends. When they got to the bus terminal, my mother's friend told her to stay where she was, and she would go find a taxi to take them to the hotel to drop off their luggage and freshen up before going to the flower show.

While my mother waited, she noticed a young man who seemed despondent. She struck up a conversation with him and he told her his name and that right after he arrived in Boston from Montreal, he received word that his mother had died. He was so broken up, that he did not notice when his entire luggage was stolen, including a small bag with his wallet with all of his money and credit cards. He said he was trying to figure out how he could get back to Montreal for the funeral without any money. He never asked my mother for money, but she gave him everything that she had in her purse. Then he left, thanking her.

Her friend returned with the taxi and my mother related her story. Her friend said that she did not have enough money for the two of them and that they would have to cancel their reservations for dinner and the hotel. They had tickets to go to the flower show and they would have to return home that same day. So the taxi took them directly to the show, and they went around all day with their luggage in tow. My mother's friend was not happy to say the least. They had planned this trip for some time.

On the trip home, my mother was a captive, and her friend harangued her about how she could have been so stupid as to listen to the fellow's sob story and give away her money. My mother felt badly that their trip didn't go as planned, but she said, "Well we saw the flower show. That was the main event of our trip. It was beautiful."

The next day, she told my sister the story, and she echoed the same attitude of the friend. Then she told me the story and what her friend had said and what my sister had said, and asked me what I thought. I paused a minute and said, "Well, you did what you thought was right. That's what counts."

She called me a few days later and told me she remembered the name the fellow had given her and she went to the library and looked up the death notices for Montreal for that period, and found none that matched his name. She conceded that her friend and my sister were probably right—that he had preyed on her and bilked her out of her money.

Then she said, "I don't care. For a nice young man like him to make up a story like that to wheedle money from an old lady like me, he really must have needed the money anyway. I'm glad that I gave it to him" ■



Brother Christopher and Janine Lazarus became certified CGC evaluators and issued our first Canine Good Citizen Test devised by the AKC.

Putting our canine citizens to the test

A group of dogs and their owners stirred up a bit of a flurry in our new Training Arena Saturday November 16th. They came to participate in the first Canine Good Citizen (CGC) Test to be given at New Skete.

In response to interest from our dog friends, the New Skete Training Team decided it was time to provide our community and some of our clients with a place to bring their dogs for certification for the Canine Good Citizen. To this end, Brother Christopher and Janine Lazarus recently became certified CGC Evaluators.

The Canine Good Citizen Test consists of a set of 10 commands and situations devised by the American Kennel Club (AKC) to test the behavior and good manners of our companion dogs.

Some of these commands are fairly basic such as sit, down and

stay but others can test many dogs a little more; being asked to stay with a stranger while the owner leaves the room for three minutes, for example!

Our group had some diverse characters, including Brother Christopher's new puppy Zoe and a Pointing Griffon with a history of dog aggression.

We had some surprises too — a beautifully behaved Pointer who was completely fazed by being brushed, and a young male shepherd who was waaay too interested in all the other dogs.

Then the rains came but everyone managed to keep a sense of humor throughout the deluge that came down and we stayed dry and had a lot of fun!

We will post future CGC Tests at the Post Office, on our Website and on the Monastery board for interested candidates.

- *The successfully*
- *certified new Canine*
- *Good Citizens and*
- *their owners are:*
-
- New Skete's **LILA**
- Carl and Anna Patka
-
- New Skete's **ZOE**
- Brother Christopher
-
- New Skete's **THOR**
- Margrete Falls
-
- **DARBY**
- Ian and Thessally Killer
-
- **BEN**
- Sean O'Connell
-
- **MAISEY**
- Dianne and Jimmy
- Morgan
-
- **HENRY**
- Kevin Duncan
-
-

Personal Symbols

An aid to prayer

By BROTHER DAVID

We often think of symbols merely as things that point beyond themselves to something else -- we even speak of "traffic symbols" -- but that is but a small aspect of what a symbol is. First and possibly most importantly, symbols participate and share in the reality towards which they point. Symbols cannot be "invented" rather, they come into being out of our being -- they arise out of our unconscious. Symbols are also integrating. They put things together for us and thereby reveal more about the reality towards which they point. Finally symbols have "lives:" they come into existence, they can change and sometimes they pass out of existence.

Consider the symbolism of the cross. Most obviously it points to Jesus' passion and death, but when we hear of people dishonoring the cross we can feel angry and personally attacked. Indeed, that is what the action is about: the dishonoring of the cross is a dishonoring of the one who died thereon and his followers. However it goes further than that because we see a cross, be it wood, metal, even jewel-encrusted, as holy in and of itself and so it is treated with reverence for its own sake. It was not always so. Cicero once said that the very word "cross" ought not enter the mouth or even the thoughts of a Roman because of the horror that it represented. Thus the symbol of the cross changed from something that represented horror and death to something that presents to us again (re-presents) Jesus in his life, suffering, death AND resurrection. The cross has become a symbol of life.

Most symbols we deal with are religious or societal (meta-personal) but the idea of a personal symbol is not new. As an example,

there are North American native tribes which have institutionalized this quest through rites of initiation in which a youth would embark on a vision-quest for a Spirit Guide -- frequently an animal -- the qualities of which the initiate would seek to emulate. So it is for us. Sitting in prayer, attentive, not forcing the issue or desiring any specific outcome, we ask God to reveal ourselves to us. We look towards God as towards a mirror and accept what is presented to us. We ask for a vision. We do this persistently over time seeing what is steadily revealed to us. As time goes on and we are aware of this presence, we can look at it and explore it.

In my own work around this, I found my symbol to be a crystal globe. The original vision was a swirling cloud of shiny particles -- glitter! As I watched this cloud over time, I came to see that I had been trying to make myself look big and shiny and to hide my failings and defects by deflecting back the light (God!): I was shiny but really in the dark. However there was something at the core of the cloud -- something solid. As I sat with that cloud over a long time, the glitter started to settle and there remained a small crystal globe suspended in the air through which the light shone. There are many colors in the globe (all the events of my life) but the light illuminating them makes them beautiful. There is no need to hide in a cloud of glitter.

As we regularly pray with and through our symbols, we let them teach us about ourselves and about the Source of all that illuminates all.

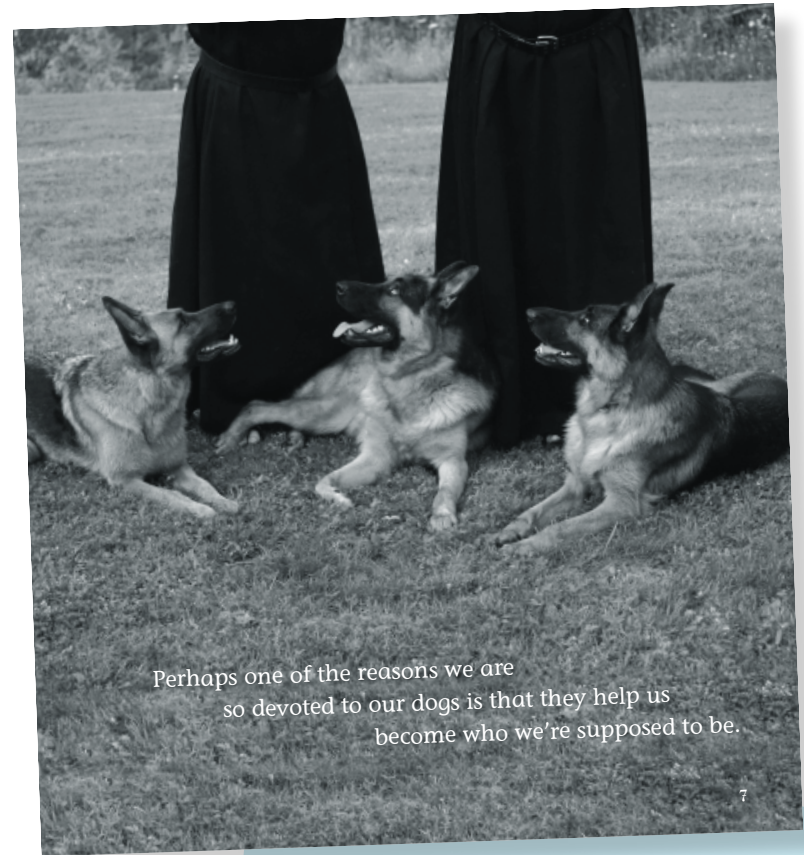
Note: I am indebted to the writings of Paul Tillich for many of the ideas on the nature of symbol. ■



Brother David

We look towards God as towards a mirror and accept what is presented to us.

Excerpts from the Monks' new book **Dogs & Devotion** which celebrates our lives with dogs.



Perhaps one of the reasons we are so devoted to our dogs is that they help us become who we're supposed to be.

PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL

How easy to get lost in a dog's eyes!



They are the pathways to its soul, orbs that help us realize the depth of good will and devotion that are ours at a moment's notice. They reveal sentiments that are focused and sincere, beyond doubt and questioning. A dog's eyes do not lie. When we catch the gaze of our best friend, there is no shame, no embarrassment, only the sheer transparency of a creature who can't possibly deceive and whose love can never be merited.

Our “NOW” has a future

Midway in Strategic Planning

When we began our strategic planning process a year ago, we did not know where it would take us, but we knew we had to make a move. For almost a decade we had been examining our life and asking ourselves a myriad of questions about how we live our monastic vocation. We explored how to: improve our communication skills; understand what intimacy means in a celibate community; better integrate our income-producing work with our prayer and contemplative life; better appreciate and honor the diversity in our community of celibate men and women, and married couples; understand the various facets of our life as ministries; and bring more people into active participation in our ministries (e.g., vocations; Chapel Community members; guests and retreatants; customers; supporters).

We were good at asking questions. We were not always as good at agreeing on answers. So we sought help. First, with a variety of advisers who helped us process all these questions. Eventually we selected a consulting firm, the Zielinski Companies, to help us refine our goals and move us toward some honest, realistic answers.

We are optimistic that “Our NOW has a Future” because of an increasing number of inquiries and exploratory visits from individuals and couples interested in entering monastic life at New Skete.

Strategic planning processes always begin by gathering data. So the Zielinski people first asked MANY questions: regarding our organizational structure and operations; about our businesses and financial operations (including charitable contributions) that support our community; and, most importantly, about who we are and why New Skete exists – and why we want to well into the future! This process has continued for most of 2009. In November, we began to move out of the data-gathering stage and into the real challenging phase of revising and reorganization.

Prior to this, the monks had engaged an architect to give New Skete a baseline set of architectural drawings that clarified existing conditions and provided concept drawings for future improvements to our buildings, residences and worship spaces. Moving from concept drawings to detailed architectural plans for specific work can occur in phases as needs and opportunities coincide. The Companions have a smaller residence and less need for such architectural assistance at this time, yet future growth in the community may mean expansion. The Sisters are now in a well-designed space with architectural drawings already available, so they have a baseline from which to work. As new vocations

develop, a chapel at the Sisters may become a reality.

In the midst of this planning process, we realized that some improvements are needed even before our strategic planning process is complete. At the Monks, an elevator has moved from a “someday” need to a current one. The lack of one prevents our aging members, as well as some guests, from maneuvering between the interior of the monastery and the Church.

Another matter of access involves transportation; the van used for transporting our wheelchair-bound monastics – equipped with a hydraulic lift – is at the end of its operational life. We are looking to replace it with a “lightly-used” vehicle (also with hydraulic lift) for transporting members of the Community and guests who need assistance.

We are optimistic that “Our NOW has a Future” because of an increasing number of inquiries and exploratory visits from individuals and couples interested in entering monastic life at New Skete.

To continue welcoming prospective vocations -- and guests of all types -- we are planning improvements to our hospitality and outreach program (e.g., design for a progressive, integrated website representing all of our community; improvements to existing guest facilities at all houses, including planning for a re-designed guesthouse at the Monks; and completing the strategic planning process).

In making improvements in our buildings we are incorporating “green” principles wherever possible. To begin with, fireproof inserts will conserve energy by more efficient use of wood-burning heat. We are also exploring the possibility of alternative energy sources in our upgrades, and fuel-efficient generators to keep essential power flowing during our not-infrequent power outages.

This set of projected improvements can be completed if we achieve our ambitious campaign (fundraising) goal of \$425,000. (This is more than twice as much as we raised in 2009.)

As we prepare for these improvements in 2010 — some immediate needs, some laying groundwork for the next few years — we respectfully ask that you consider joining us in achieving them.

As always, we Nuns, Monks and Companions will be contributing “NOW” to “Our Future” through our earned income, and with the help of families, individuals and foundations who believe in our work and way of life, we can be successful.

If you are interested in helping with this campaign, or would like more information, please contact:

Brother Luke: Brluke@newskete.org
Sister Cecelia: srccharvey9@gmail.com
Sister Melanie: companionsofnewskete@wildblue.net

Thank YOU for your commitment to ensure New Skete’s future!

— BROTHER LUKE
Prior, Monks of New Skete

THE 2009 NEW SKETE PILGRIMAGE: A Visitor Returns

By ELLEN FAIR

New Skete's fifth annual pilgrimage on August 8th was accompanied by beautiful weather of a sort rarely seen in late summer: clear skies, sparkling sun, cool temperatures and low humidity. No dog days here! This year's theme was "Jesus: The Heart of Renewal," and more than 150 guests attended the much-anticipated event. I was delighted to be among them for the second year in a row—an unexpected treat for one who in the past has often had to send regrets from an overly busy New York City office.



Ellen Fair

Geographical diversity was a hallmark of this year's pilgrimage, with attendees of many faiths arriving from New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and as far away as Russia and Ethiopia.

As in the past, the program began at a bracingly early hour with Matins and Divine Liturgy. The services were followed by Brother Stavros' wonderfully detailed tour of the Holy Wisdom Temple and its icons, and by the opening of the always-popular food court, where a delicious sampling of homemade, largely eastern European fare—and, of course, cheesecake!—could be had throughout the day.

The meditation gardens at Emmaus House were also made available to all, providing the beauty and tranquility sought by many guests, some of whom were visiting the monastery for the very first time.

Not long after lunch, visitors reassembled in the Temple of Holy Wisdom for a talk on "Christ in Theology: Conversion and Purification," by Dr. Peter Bouteneff, an associate professor in systematic theology at St.

Vladimir's Seminary. Belying the slightly intimidating title of the presentation, Dr. Bouteneff's eloquent lecture underscored the importance of making liturgy accessible, as well as the inextricable link between prayer and seeking the knowledge of God, and how the search for that knowledge may affect one's inner life.

While some of us mulled over Peter Bouteneff's opening remark that "a theologian is one who prays (truly), and the one who prays is a theologian," (a statement which, as he put it, opened up "a Chinese box" of meanings), younger guests took a break and joined Irene Headwell and New York State Forest Ranger Michael Bodnar on a hike around New Skete's bucolic wooded trails.

Mid-afternoon found Sister Melanie offering a guided meditation at Emmaus House, while Brother David gave an alfresco talk about monastic life for both adults and youth(s) on the gift shop lawn.

Later, everyone delighted in the perennially popular dog-training demonstration by Brother Christopher and New Skete's head dog trainer Janine Lazarus, whose notably relaxed canine guest "stars" managed the not inconsiderable feat of obeying each command to the letter, without sacrificing their own deep spiritual need to enjoy themselves and entertain the crowd.

When the dog-training demonstration was finished, we hurried back up the hill to Holy Wisdom Temple for Sister Rebecca's presentation "The Icon and the Heart of Renewal in Christ." Sister Rebecca spoke of images and meaning not only in traditional Orthodox Christian iconography, but also in more modern expressions thereof, such as Picasso's powerful "Guernica." It was beautiful and satisfying, while leaving open such

intriguing questions as "what is uncreated light?"

At the end of the day, the now-traditional healing service was held, with its fragrant anointing. It was followed by the post-festive Vigil of Transfiguration, and the day was done.

On reflection, the theme of renewal seemed particularly apt in view of the changes and challenges over the twelve months that have passed since the last pilgrimage. At one point that day I found myself in the monastery's cemetery, remembering four community—I should say family—members of New Skete whose absence was keenly felt by all: Brother Elias, Sister Katrina, Nadja Goldsmith, and Millie Katz.

I thought of tiny Millie, tirelessly working the phones for Obama less than a year ago. And I wept.

But then I could imagine her saying: "He won! Move on."

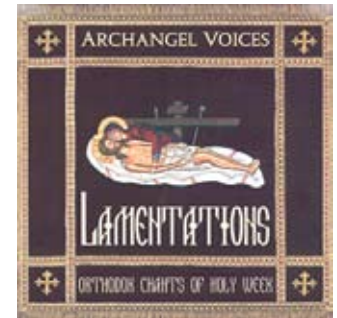
Yes. Renewal. Christ is in our midst. On to next year. ■

Special Thanks!

In preparation for this summer's pilgrimage, a group of parishioners and friends from the Boston area gave the ceilings and murals on the walls of our first church, Holy Transfiguration, a good cleaning to remove the mold that had begun to accumulate from before the new roofing was in place. The icons look a lot brighter now and the little church is more welcoming. We appreciate all the hard work, especially the scaffold climbers!



MUSIC REVIEW



LAMENTATIONS: ORTHODOX CHANTS OF HOLY WEEK Archangel Voices

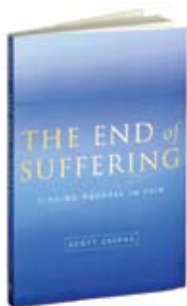
By BROTHER LUKE

Archangel Voices, a superb vocal chamber ensemble directed by Vladimir Morosan, that specializes in Orthodox Christian liturgical music sung in English, has just issued a new CD entitled Lamentations: Orthodox Chants of Holy Week. This new CD is ideal for anyone looking for music appropriate for meditation. In addition, it offers a selection of chants that will entice church choir directors to broaden their choir's musical repertoire for Holy Week. Ranging from Kastalsky to Znamenny and Greek chant, with examples of Arabic, Romanian and Armenian melodies mixed in, this is a disc that broadens our musical horizons while maintaining the prayerful ethos of Orthodox Holy Week services. Highly recommended. It is available from the Monks Gift Shop as well as direct from musicarussica.com.

'Grist for the mill'

By BROTHER CHRISTOPHER
Human suffering is probably the most perplexing issue we have to grapple with. It defies being ignored. It captures our attention and brings our humanity front and center before its inexorable reality. Religions were founded on it, and no religion has persisted without trying to address its daunting challenge. Admittedly, some explanations are more helpful than others. 'It's God's will' or 'God's ways are not our ways' come across as pabulum and do little to relieve suffering's existential pain. One is left with a subtle resentment against such 'easy answers.' At the same time, our souls can't leave things stuck in that sort of dead end. We crave some sensible way to make meaning out of our trials, to accept the transformative aspects that arise whenever we deal with suffering and adversity.

When a book comes along that offers fresh thinking on suffering, and is unapologetically religious, but not embarrassingly so, gratitude is due. The End of Suffering, the most recent work by the poet Scott Cairns, offers a timely and personal meditation on suffering that rings true, and by its deep compassion and understanding, may bring healing. Beautifully written and easy to read, Cairns never wanders far from the believable. His examples run the gamut from 9/11 to the very solitary suffering contained in the act of burying his beloved dogs. He sticks to what is real and immediate, and helps us experience how our afflictions drag us kicking and screaming "into a fresh and vivid awareness that we are not in control of our circumstances, that we are not quite whole, that our days are salted with afflictions". (p.9)



THE END OF SUFFERING
 by Scott Cairns
 Paraclete Press, 2009
 126pp, paper,
 ISBN 978-1-55725-563-1

When a book comes along that offers fresh thinking on suffering, and is unapologetically religious, but not embarrassingly so, gratitude is due.

Beyond stating the obvious, Cairns connects such experience with a self-stripping that moves us from self-preoccupation to mystery. Our sufferings wake us up and lead us to prayer - not a prayer that is extorted by a powerful God who delights in twisting arms - but the humble confession of one seeking to understand.

In each of the book's eight chapters Cairns skillfully blends patristic wisdom with a modern interpretation. The result feels fresh, while still staying anchored (as opposed to mired) in tradition. For example, chapter three, "One body -- his", explores the relationship of creativity with suffering. As an artist, Cairns shows how artists strive to make meaning out of the broad circumstances of life and through those efforts find consolation in a subconscious hope, an implicit faith. From this Cairns intuits our connection to the body of Christ and our life in Him. God in Christ understands our whole experience from the inside and we in turn can share in that divine knowledge. Our experiences of suffering have the capacity to make us more conscious of the mystery of the whole, of the one body, and of our connection with it. The one who truly suffers moves from self-focus to a greater sensitivity to one's connection with the whole, in imitation of Christ. This doesn't justify suffering, but it helps us see meaning in it.

I can warmly recommend Cairn's book as a stimulating companion to prayer and meditation, useful, for example, as a Lenten reflection. His style is personal and the writing graceful. The notes are helpful and encourage further investigation. For a relatively short work it carries plenty of grist for the mill. ■

The Sacred Harp

New Skete spreads its vocal wings to embrace a singing tradition with local roots and finds fellowship

By BROTHER STAVROS



In July Brothers Christopher and Stavros invited their shape note class for an evening of singing in Holy Wisdom (above), and participated with 201 singers at the New York State Sacred Harp Singing Convention at Hubbard Hall in Cambridge (left).

In the late 1700's one Eliakim Doolittle from Argyle, a village less than twenty miles from New Skete, became an itinerate singing master, composing and teaching hymns to the remote settlements of the soon-to-be states of New York and Vermont. The texts were deeply scriptural, sober yet joyful and the melodies sung a capella in four parts not unlike the content of our tradition of sacred hymnology and the harmonies intoned with the vigor and raw beauty I remember from the Carpatho-Russian plain chant.

During the 19th century this native style was elbowed out of New York and New England in favor of European choral compositions. It then took root in the Southeast and has, in the past decades enjoyed a revival, coming full circle back to our own neighborhood. The genius of this mode of singing is a system of notation of two

sets of four notes: fa ▲, sol ●, la ■, and mi ◆, giving the moniker of shape note singing. The ancient form of Russian monastic chant, called znammenyj, also employed signs or shapes to indicate the melodies.

The hymns were collected in a succession of editions, the first in Albany in 1800, and the most popular called The Sacred Harp in continuous publication from 1844 to 1991. In the Eastern Christian tradition musical instruments are excluded in deference to the sacred harp of the human voice.

The name obviously recalls David and the Psalms; the book's introduction also points out that the two oldest books of the Bible: Genesis and Job make reference to praising God in music. Accounts of the Lord's last meal with the disciples note that they sang the customary hymns. The fourth century hymnist Ephrem the Syrian was surnamed Harp of the Spirit.

Conscious of all this history combined with my first exposure to the genre from an LP called Rivers of Delight we acquired in the

An official tone pitcher gives the note which all match and with the motion of your hand the mighty sound starts up.

Please see SINGING /Page 18

SINGING Continued from page 17

60's, I was elated when Singing Master Jesse Pearlman Karlsberg began a singing school last February in the village. We met monthly and developed a fellowship. On the evening of July 17 we invited the group to sing in Holy Wisdom giving some of our monastic and parish community members a chance to participate.

On October 17 and 18 Cambridge hosted the New York State Sacred Harp Singing Convention at Hubbard Hall, the 1878 opera house in the middle of town. Two hundred and one singers gathered including Brother Christopher and myself, from 13 states and 2 Canadian provinces. Both of us were among the one hundred and eight leaders in the course of the convention. Leading requires keeping the beat of the piece with and up-down hand stroke, selecting verses and repetitions of refrains. I have spent my whole monastic life singing our chants in the background, so, I was at once thrilled and in no small measure apprehensive to stand in the hollow square of the four parts of 201 voices. An official tone pitcher gives the note which all match and with the motion of your hand the mighty sound starts up.

I picked David's Lament by William Billings, 1778. A short but stately and passionate text: David, the king was grieved and moved; he went to his chamber, his chamber and wept; And as he went he wept, and said, O my son! O my son! Would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! In the back of my head was a powerful identification with a couple of fathers I know who have lost a son, two to tragic accidents and others to the current wars, and yet realize the emotion of the hymn only glances the depth of such a loss.

Many of the songs, however, are ecstatically joyful, and both Br. Christopher and I marveled at the ability of seasoned singers who can move so nimbly over a rush of notes my eyes can barely take in. Our experience was spiritually enriching and socially it provided an occasion to invite new acquaintances to visit the monastery and hear our choral tradition and appreciate Orthodoxy through this shared passion for the sacred harp. ■

A LETTER FROM BROTHER JOHN

I would like to thank everyone for their support and generosity during my time in need. I would especially like to thank Dartmouth Medical Center and Mt Ascutney Hospital for your encouraging help and your spiritual awareness. I could not have made it through without everyone's prayers and support.

A special thanks to Brother David, Roy Tobin, and Debbie Prive for your personal care and assistance. A special thank you to Julia Gates for keeping the dog program going during my recovery. I know it was a long road that started in November 2008 and all was made easier knowing I had all the above to lean on.

It was a blessing and a learning experience.

*Thank you and God Bless,
— Brother John*

NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITIES



Pilgrimage procession to Holy Wisdom Temple led by Heiromonk Christopher with Fr. Terenti Wasielewski, and Fr. Alvin Smirensky, above; lunch at the food court, right; Brother John at the Healing Service, lower right.

The Monks were happy to welcome **Brother John** back to the monastery in July after many months away in surgery and rehabilitation facilities at **Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center** and **Mt Ascutney Hospital**. His leg is still on the mend — a slow process — but he is resuming some of his past activities, in addition to learning new skills around walking with a walker and a cane. He is back working with **Julia Gates** in the dog breeding program and working in the kitchen with **Debra Prive, Bill Smith** and the brothers who have cooking duties.

Brother Stavros and **Sister Rebecca** attended in June the annual **Orientalia Lumen** conference at **Catholic University** in Washington DC where **Metropolitan Jonah** gave an important address on monasticism.

Alex McNeil received this year's **New Skete Creative Writing Award** presented to her by **Brother Luke** at the **Cambridge Central School Awards** program June 28th.

Fr. Borys Godziak, rector of the **Ukrainian Catholic University**, Lviv, Ukraine, visited us July 31st. He was very interested in our Holy Wisdom church design as inspiration for part of their new university chapel.

Kevin Lawrence returned to New Skete to lead another music workshop in August after completion of his



own Summer Music Institute in Burlington VT. **Father Alexander Garklavs**, Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America was with us for the Feast of the Transfiguration. It was a wonderful chance to spend time with an old friend of the communities.



Professor Peter Bouteneff at our Annual Pilgrimage

Professor Peter Bouteneff of **St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary** was the main speaker at our **Annual Pilgrimage** and stayed after to record interviews with several brothers and sisters to be a future broadcast on **Ancient Faith Radio**.

Brother Stavros traveled to the **Myrrhbearers** in Otego, NY,

NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITIES



Many guests joined with the community to celebrate St. Francis Feast day October 4th and participate in our Annual Animal Blessing.

and then to **St Tikhon's Monastery** for their patronal feast in August. He and Sister Rebecca attended the Monastic Conference held at the Romanian **Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God** in Rives Junction, MI in November.

Ray Lammon delivered his architect's report to the Monks of New Skete in August, an important milestone in the communities current strategic planning process. The report included existing conditions review as well as architectural concept drawings of a larger plan for future improvements in the buildings.

The Community returned to **Christ the King Spiritual Life Center** for a Renewal Day to work on our new web site "newskete.org" and then spent some leisure time together away from the usual tasks at the monastery.

The consultants from the **Zielinski Company** returned in the fall for visits in September, November and December to continue gathering data and then to begin to develop proposals for the communities to review as we move forward with **strategic planning**. Everyone was excited about the proposal to streamline and integrate our business operations. [See article on page 12.]

Brothers Christopher and Stavros deliver a



presentation at **St. Vladimir's Seminary Education Day**, October 3rd, entitled: *Let Everything that Breathes: Kinship with Animals and Deepening of Spiritual Awareness*. The receptive crowd included Kate Behr and Pat Bouteneff and their New Skete Shepherds!

Many guests joined with the community to celebrate **St. Francis Feast** day October 4th and participate in our **Annual Animal Blessing**.

Over 30 people attended a retreat October 17th on **Icons & Animals: Symbols of God** led by **Sister Rebecca** and **Brothers Christopher, David and Stavros**.

The communities were also honored by the request from **Fr. Alvia Smirensky** to be officially attached as retired archpriest to Holy Wisdom Temple, New Skete Monastery, which was blessed by **His Beatitude Metropolitan Jonah**.

Many old friends have come on retreat to the **New**

NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITIES

Skete Companions, including: **Fr. Thomas Beck** and his wife **Marilyn**; **Larry** and **Rose Marie Joyce**, childhood friends of **Brother Stephen**; **Charles** and **Ellendale Hoffman**, who also visited with **Brother John** while they were here and received some dog training tips from **Brother Christopher**. **Marlene Watson** visited with her priest, **Julie Cicora**. Marlene has been a New Skete shepherd owner for years and was glad to be able to make personal contact again. Other visitors to the communities during the summer and fall including **Rev. Ken James Stavrevsky** and **Deacon Stephen Sweet** from Rochester NY, **Fr. Michael Plekon**, **Fr. Hal Dudash**, **Fr. Vladimir** and **Anna Danylevitch**.

David Wilson, from **St. Francis University**, who is a friend of the monks' community, stayed with the Companions for a working weekend. He painted a room and accomplished many gardening tasks before moving up to the brothers guest house, to spend a work retreat with them. **Bill** and **Jean Nicholson** stopped by for a brief visit on their way to a wedding and donated many books.

Our new guests include **John** and **Kristen Coatney**. John just returned from a year of service in Iraq as a veterinarian. He palpated **Petra** while here and was correct in predicting that she would have puppies. He is now assigned to the Great Lakes Naval Base. **Lou Matthews** was another new guest. He is married and has five children and plans to return next year with his family. We hope that both of these couples will be able to come next year on retreat.



Petra nursing her first 5 pups, 3 more yet to be born. Whelping lasted 20 hours!

Sister Rebecca at the Monastic Conference in Rives Junction, MI with two nuns from The Monastery of Saints Mary and Martha, Wagener, SC.



The **Nuns of New Skete** hope to add an outside deck off the guest living room for our guests and refurbish the nuns kitchen. Three of the nuns attended a conference given at **Greymoore** sponsored by the **Monastic Association for Contemplative Communities** in November. **Sister Elizabeth Johnson** spoke on **Ecological Considerations in the Quest for the Living God**.

Sables are back! We are happy to report that this last period we were blessed with 40 puppies from five litters. **Luna, Xenia, Bella, Petra** and **Basta** all had litters this summer and fall. For Petra and Basta, this was their first litters and what a surprise! Petra had eight sables, six males and two females, while Basta, just arrived from Germany, had six pups, four sables and two black and tan. Luna, Xenia and Bella's pups were all the traditional black and tan. The breeding program also underwent some transitions. Luna and **Sasha** were retired and are now with their new families. Basta a sable female and **Jarus**, a black and tan male, are our new arrivals from Germany.

Members of the New Skete community joined in an ecumenical prayer service for Thanksgiving at the **Cambridge Presbyterian Church** Thanksgiving Eve.



Petra and Xerxes play tug-of-war with a Frisbee.

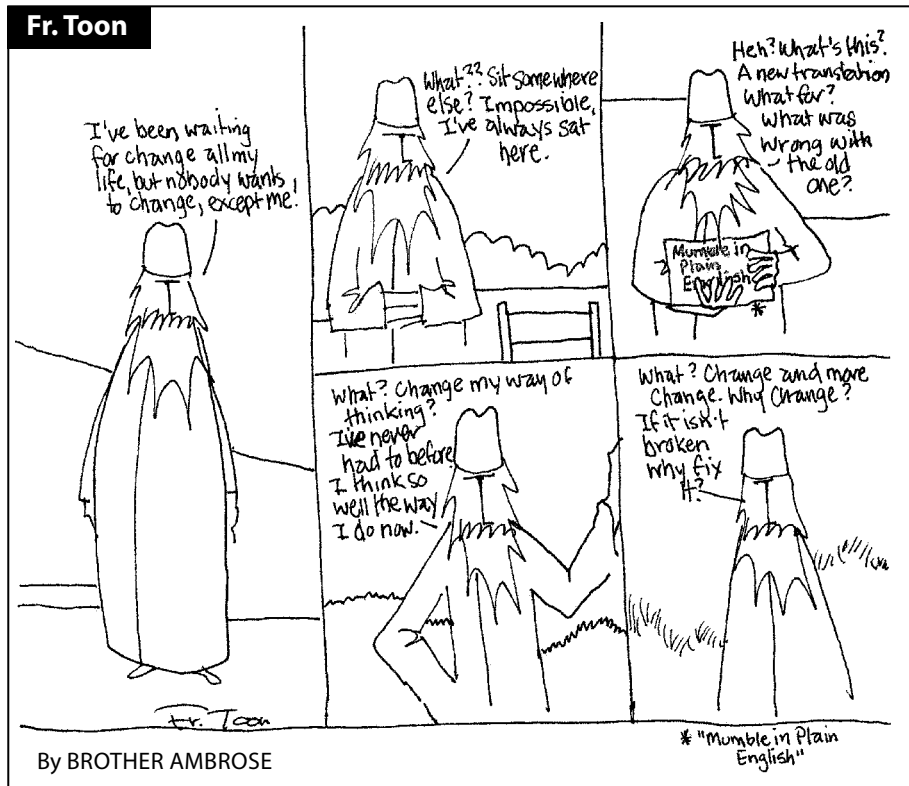
Brother Elias' Stuffed Peppers

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large green or sweet red pepper per person (cut recipe accordingly)
- Filling for 12 peppers:*
- 3 cups brown rice
- Tomato juice or vegetable broth
- 10 slices fresh white bread crumbs
- 12 oz. cashew nuts chopped
- 2 large onions chopped
- 1 lb. grated sharp cheddar cheese
- 3 cups tomato sauce

PROCEDURE:

1. Prepare rice according to instructions but instead of water use tomato juice or vegetable broth seasoned with a little sesame oil and spices (garlic powder, paprika).
2. Sauté onions in butter until golden.
3. Halve peppers lengthwise; remove seeds & stem.
4. Steam peppers in basket over water 10 minutes until softened a little. Set aside to cool.
5. Mix together cooked rice, breadcrumbs, chopped cashews, sautéed onions, and cheese.
6. Mound stuffing into pepper halves and place peppers in an oiled baking pan. Top with tomato sauce and additional cheddar.
7. Bake in 325 degree oven ½ hour or until easily pierced with a fork.



We invite you to visit New Skete to experience our lovely setting, our services and choir, our monastic life and hospitality, or our modest guesthouse. Or a combination!

ONLINE:
The New Skete Newsletter is now available online (and in color!) as a PDF document. If you would prefer to receive our newsletter in electronic format, please send your name, address and email address to:
webmonastic@newskete.org
We will put you on an electronic mailing list and notify you when the next issue will be available.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 28 – SUNDAY, JANUARY 3

Experience monastic life
An opportunity for seekers to experience life at New Skete

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6
Feast of Theophany

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24 – SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13
Communities winter retreat
During this retreat the monastery closed to the public

SATURDAY, MARCH 6
One Day Lenten Prayer Retreat

For information and to register call 518-677-3928

MONDAY, MAY 3 – SATURDAY, MAY 8
Communities spring retreat
During this retreat the monastery is closed to the public

MONDAY, MAY 17 – SUNDAY, MAY 23
Experience monastic life
An opportunity for seekers to experience life at New Skete

SUNDAY, MAY 23
Feast of Pentecost

SATURDAY, JUNE 5
New Skete Open House
We join in Cambridge's Annual Festival. Our Open House, includes exhibits, tours, training demos

FRIDAY, AUGUST 6
Feast of the Transfiguration

SATURDAY, AUGUST 7
Annual Pilgrimage: Hidden Holiness
Guest speaker: Fr. Michael Plekon, St Gregory's Orthodox Church, Professor of Sociology, Baruch College; Post festive Matins, Liturgy & Vespers; Healing service; food court, tours, hikes, dog training demonstration, exhibits, gift shops

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15
Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15 – SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12
Communities summer retreat
During this retreat the monastery closed to the public

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 5
Nativity of the Theotokos
(celebrated)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14
Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross

MONDAY, OCTOBER 4
Feast of St. Francis – Blessing of Animals

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24
Theotokos of the Sign Feast Patronal Feast of the Nuns of New Skete



The Communities of New Skete

c/o The Monks of New Skete

P.O. Box 128

Cambridge, NY 12816



New Skete's Dux approves of the Certificate of Achievement awarded to the New Skete puppy kennel by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. This significant and rare 'Paw of Approval' is due especially to the hard work of Julia Gates and many volunteers.

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