HOLY MYRRHBEARERS MONASTERY
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A monastery for women in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA)

# Essays and Notes

**Volume 23, no. 2** **Fall 2026**

HOLY MYRRHBEARERS MONASTERY
ANNOUNCEMENTS

# 50TH ANNIVERSARY
## & PATRONAL FEAST CELEBRATION

***Eve of the Sunday of Holy Myrrhbearers***

## SATURDAY, MAY 15, 2027

DIVINE LITURGY 10 AM WITH

*His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon*

*His Eminence Archbishop Michael*

COFFEE HOUR TO FOLLOW

BANQUET IN ONEONTA

WOMEN'S RETREAT

SOUVENIR BOOKLET

**SCAN TO REGISTER, SPONSOR, GET INVOLVED**

✢

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, WE WELCOME INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND SMALL GROUPS TO STAY IN OUR GUEST ROOMS AND GUEST HOUSE. CONTACT US TO SCHEDULE YOUR VISIT. WE CAN PICKUP FROM THE NEAREST BUS STATION (ONEONTA, NY).

✢

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HOLY MYRRHBEARERS MONASTERY
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Fall 2026

Dear Friends,

Save the date for our Golden Jubilee on Saturday, May 15! This is the eve of Holy Myrrhbearers Sunday, the day our monastery was founded 50 years ago. We'll have a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in our chapel, with a banquet in Oneonta that evening. A women's retreat is also planned. Hope you can join us! Many ways to participate from afar also—check out the QR code on the opposing page. We enclose event flyers you can share with your parish.

This issue we interview 90-year-old Mother Michaela, master storyteller, about her monastic vocation. Vocation is a topic that comes up frequently, as we've hosted guests from across the country this spring and summer. They've enjoyed getting to know our animals, including 6 lambs and 2 kid goats born in April. Our news starts on page 8.

It's time for Christmas cards! A sampling of hand-drawn designs is shown on pages 10-11. Sending our cards is a great way to spread the word about the monastery. Our online store is open 24 hours. We also accept orders by phone, mail and email. (Note new email, above.)

Greetings and prayers for you during this Nativity season!

**Christ is Born! Glorify Him!**

With love in Christ,
The Mothers and Sisters

Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, EIN 13-3104472.

***Interview with Mother Michaela:***

## How do you know if you have a monastic vocation?

*Before entering the monastery almost 67 years ago, Mother Michaela felt a call to be a nun, but fought it. She told us the story of her calling.*

**How can someone know if they have a monastic vocation?**
I don't really know. I only know about myself, and I am not a typical case. I had two or three supernatural nudges.

**Tell us about your vocation.**
I was brought up low-church Episcopal. I knew there were such things as nuns. I was always asking my mother to take me to see the Catholic nuns, who lived up in the convent by the school, but she never would. She would say, "No, the sisters have to cope with kids all week, and they don't want any more kids on the weekends." She did take me to the Catholic church once. It was nice and dark, and they had lots of votive lights. I liked it. My whole life, since I was four or five years old, if we passed a church that looked interesting, I wanted to go in. Later my mother told me that since I was about five, she had known I was destined to be a nun. My friends and I would say things like, "When I grow up, I'm going to marry a rich man." But when my friends went home, I used to say to myself, "That's what I say now, but when I grow up, I'm going to do something different."

**When did you first start thinking about being a nun?**
Once when I was ten, I was out on the porch…. My mother had bought me a rosary. I asked for one, because at school I'd been seeing that Latin American kids had them around their necks. I knew you said prayers on it, but I didn't know what to do with it. So I had put the rosary around my neck, and I was standing on the porch. And I had seen that they would kiss the cross, you know? I was doing that. And I said to myself, I think it would be fun to be a nun. And then I felt like I was taken up to a great, great height, I could see everything spread out before me. And I was still holding on to the cross. I felt like this was important. I said to myself, this is what it's like to be a nun. And then I was right back on the porch again. And I called to my mother in the



house, "Do we have nuns in our church?" And she said, "No, I think that only the Roman Catholics do," because she had no idea that the Anglicans had nuns. So I thought, well, if I can't be a nun, I guess maybe I'll marry a priest. And then I didn't think about it anymore.

**So how did monastic life come back into your thinking?**
When I was about 15, and then when I was about 20, I had two very remarkable dreams about visiting heaven and talking to God. And then forgot all about it. That was just before I went to junior college, and then I didn't think anything about it until college. And then God kept whacking me with Himself. And so I finally just gave up.

**How did God whack you?**
My college roommate and I went to Anglican church each morning for mass, and every evening for prayers. Once we went to a special mass, and I had another call during the service. For the rest of the service I was mentally out of it, in a daze. I felt like God was cornering me, and I was not interested. So I expended a lot of energy, trying to ignore it.

**Then at college you met a nun, your future abbess.**
The first time I met Mother Ruth, it didn't make an impression, just that she was a sweet little old lady, because I hadn't really been whacked yet. But when she came back the next year, I didn't go see her because I knew I couldn't escape if I did. And that's when I had a visit from my grandfather, who died when I was four. I could feel his presence. That was a shock to me. I started doing crazy things, like looking for him in the closet. He wanted me to go see the nun. But I didn't dare. So I went down to the local hamburger joint instead. And I stopped worrying about it. I realized I probably should go become a nun, but I put it in the back of my head.

**Why did you ignore the call?**
It was after college graduation, and I had a very complete life. I was happy to be teaching in the Dallas Public Schools. Two young men were taking me out every week. I was enjoying myself, taking modern dance lessons. I was not looking to go into a monastery. I was running away as hard as I could.

Then I made the mistake of going to my landlord's granddaughter's confirmation. I was bored to death. We were down in the basement, and she was asking the bishop to sign her confirmation book. Suddenly I got pushed so hard, I nearly fell on top of the bishop. I just staggered forward. He jumped back and looked very alarmed. And I just couldn't stop myself and said, "I am seriously considering religious vocation." The bishop said, "Good, good! Write me a letter." So I did. I'm sure it was my grandfather who pushed me. Originally I was so frustrated. I felt like saying to my grandfather, "Can't you leave me alone?" Then, I don't know what happened, but I ceased to be apprehensive about it. I stopped feeling like, I can't do this. So I wrote Mother Ruth a letter and made plans to join her convent in New York City. First I had to go see the school principal, of course, and I had to teach until the end of January 1960. Now I look back and am so thankful that God called me when He did. I could have really gone the wrong way.

**How did people react hearing that you were going to be a nun?**

The people who really knew me were not surprised. The people who didn't really know me were flabbergasted. My grandmother was upset. But she knew I would be safe, and that's what mattered to her. My cousins were all horrified. My other grandmother, my dad's mother, was horrified too. She asked, "How have I failed you?" My father laughed and said, "It's just another of her adventures. She'll be back in six months." But my mother wasn't surprised at all. She said, "I have enough sense to know you don't really belong to me." I told her, "I think God wants me to do this, and I owe it to Him to give it a try." +

**Animal Jokes**

Q: What did the cat say when it was put into the cat carrier?

A: Get meow't of here!

Q: How do the cats reply when a nun asks, "Who's hungry?"

A: Me! Ow!

Q: What do the sheep say to greet the Shepherdess?

A: Hay!



HOLY MYRRHBEARERS MONASTERY
50TH ANNIVERSARY

144 BERT WASHBURN ROAD + OTEGO, NY 13825 + TEL: (607) 432-3179
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With heart-felt joy we bring news of **Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery's Golden Jubilee**! On May 15, 2027 (eve of Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearers), we will gather at the monastery in Otego to celebrate a hierarchical divine liturgy with His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop Michael of the Diocese of NY and NJ, Chancellor V. Rev. Alessandro Margheritino and other distinguished clergy. Afterwards, coffee hour and monastery tours will be followed by a banquet in Oneonta. The monastery will also offer a women's retreat that weekend.

To prepare for the upcoming anniversary, we (the Trustees) of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery are asking for parishes and individuals who can get involved. Everyone has different talents, and some may not be able to come physically, but can contribute and share their love in other ways. Here are some ways you can help:

**Join a workday**, like the work parties when the community was young. Gardening, yard work, inside / outside maintenance - jobs for all ages. Bring your tools and prepare to get dirty and enjoy fellowship. The monastery will provide meals and opportunities for prayer during the day. Saturdays: Feb 27, Mar 27, Apr 17, 2027.

**Help with Divine Liturgy.** We will have a large tent outdoors so everyone can attend Divine Liturgy and coffee hour. We will need to borrow extra tables and chairs, and AV equipment to televise Liturgy to the tent. We also need choir members. We would appreciate monetary donations for the tent, as well as for the shuttle bus between the monastery, the banquet and the hotel (Hampton Inn in Oneonta).

**Attend the Banquet.** You can purchase seats or a table to join this milestone event.

**Contribute to the Souvenir Booklet.** Please share your memories and photos of the monastery. You can also sponsor a page or an ad in the booklet.

Here is a QR code to sign-up for activities and the women's retreat. We enclose flyers you can post in your parish. Thank you for your kindness. See you on May 15, 2027!

Yours in Christ,

**Mother Raphaela** **Rebecca Hawranick**
For the Trustees of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery

**SCAN TO REGISTER, SPONSOR, GET INVOLVED**

P.S. You can also sign up -- and watch the monastery's fun anniversary video -- at: www.HMBmonastery.org/50th-anniversary/

## For our news

Our feast day on May 2, the leavetaking of Holy Myrrhbearers, was celebrated joyfully with Fr. Jim Dutko (Binghamton, Carpatho-Russian), Fr. Myron Oryhon (Ukrainian), and Fr. Micah Breland (NYC, OCA) with his family. Other Divine Liturgies served in our chapel in recent months included a Lenten Presanctified with St. Innocent Orthodox Mission served by Fr. Nikolay Khalimonov (OCA). Annunciation was served by Fr. Jim and Fr. Myron with Fr. Alexander Hurtsellers (Endicott, Carpatho-Russian). Fr. Alex returned to serve on Bright Wednesday. Divine Liturgy for St. Jude on June 19 brought Fr Myron and Fr. Aleksandar Bozhinoski (Syracuse, Macedonian). On October 1, Fr. Aleksandar returned to serve for Protection of the Holy Theotokos.

Very special in October was the Akathist for the Hawaiian Iveron icon of the Holy Theotokos, served by Fr. Ambrose Inslow (Syracuse, OCA) with the myrrh-streaming icon in our monastery chapel. Dcn. Seraphim Andov (Hawaii, ROCOR) accompanied the icon, together with Reader Christopher Lasek and his new wife Anna.

Other memorable events included hosting the 21st birthday of a member of the St. Innocent Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), and a baby's 6th month birthday. Fr. Alex Hurtsellers brought a hardworking group from St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Endicott for a workday.

We've stayed connected with the local Orthodox community by visiting parishes in Binghamton, Endicott, Vestal, Herkimer, Wappingers Falls, Watervliet, Woodside (NYC) and Mayfield (PA). We also took guests on monastery pilgrimages to St. Tikhon, St. Nektarios, Holy Trinity, Iveron, Quick To Hear, and New Skete. A joy to receive many new guests this spring and summer, and have return visits from others!

When our Trustees met in June, there was a lot of enthusiasm for the upcoming 50th anniversary. We were pleased to hear that Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop Michael, and V. Rev. Alessandro Margheritino (OCA Chancellor) will be able to join for Divine Liturgy in our monastery chapel. As in years past, we will have a tent outside for overflow.



Planning has kicked off for a banquet that afternoon in nearby Oneonta, and a women's retreat for those who want to join for the entire weekend. The anniversary also inspired a website refresh (with new domain for web and email which is easier to spell), the creation of a video, and the kickoff of Facebook and Instagram pages. As Trustee Rebecca Hawranick says in the video, at the golden jubilee we look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones. The anniversary sign-up includes ways to participate from afar, such as contributing memories or photos, and sponsoring souvenir booklet pages or events.

Current monastery wish list items include a new refrigerator and other replacements needed for cooking and hospitality – these can be sponsored on the anniversary sign-up website. We appreciate the donors who helped with previous wish list projects including gravel for the driveway and barn road, and design of the new website.

We enjoyed participating in both the Otsego and Chenango County Fairs. Mother Katherine swept the wool / yarn / farm fiber craft section with many blue ribbons. Our novice (Sister Emily) earned blue ribbons for photography, crochet, and baking, and our summer guest earned a Best in Show, Culinary for a 4 layer cake with 4 types of frosting.

Zoar Farms had an active breeding season with three ewes delivering six lambs, and Maisie giving birth to twin kids. Unfortunately a weasel got into the chicken coop, so we lost a dozen birds, but we do have three hens in the barn. Also new puppies – brother and sister Great Pyrenees.

The garden is finally making a comeback! We are thankful to a guest and her husband who cleared it of weeds. A friend recently set up her RV on our property and offered to help with the garden and flower beds. With that help, plus work days scheduled for spring, we aim to be ready when you come to Otego for our anniversary in May 2027!

We ask for your prayers for our monastery, and that God will continue to send women who have been called to test their vocations to monastic life. We keep you all in our prayers and look forward to greeting you:

***"Christ is born! Glorify Him!"***

# CHRISTMAS CARDS

And many more ... Order now online!
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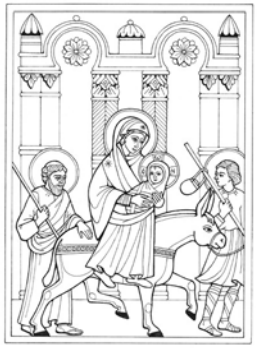

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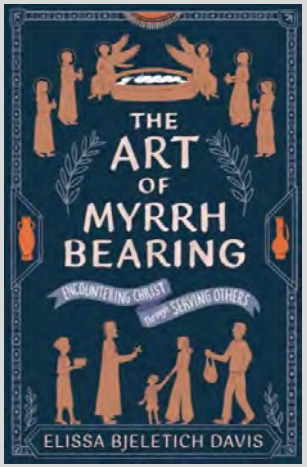
NEW! This thought-provoking book offers insights about New Testament and later myrrhbearers. Author Elissa will speak at our anniversary banquet and lead our women's retreat in May 2027.




All **cards** measure 4 1/2" x 5 1/2" and are printed on heavy stock and come with envelopes. 12 cards for $15.00 / 6 cards for $10.00.

Our online store also displays our **prayer books**, including:

*Royal Hours: Christmas, Theophany and Pascha* **No. 921**
*The Kathisma Psalter with the Nine Canticles* **No. 922**
*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 *The Art of Myrrhbearing* by Elissa Bjeletich Davis ****NEW****

**Order now at www.HMBmonastery.org!**

We also accept orders by phone at (607) 432 - 3179, by mail, and by email to sisters@HMBmonastery.org. Thank you!