

# Monastic Communities

## Communities of New Skete

### Companions of New Skete

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### Brother Stephen Updike

### Nuns of New Skete

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**Mother Patricia**  
**Mother Rita**  
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### Monks of New Skete

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*Temple of Holy Wisdom*

**Rev. Hieromonk Marc (Labish)**

**Rev. Hieromonk Christopher (Savage)**

**Archdn. Peter (Kushner)**

**Monk Elias**  
**Monk Luke**  
**Monk David**  
**Monk Stavros**  
**Monk John**

**Brother Gregory**  
**Brother Ambrose (Miles)**

## Vision

New Skete is a monastic community of the Orthodox Church in America, comprised of three separate monastic houses: the Monks, the Nuns, and the Companions of New Skete. The Typicon of New Skete, first approved by the Lesser Synod on February 1, 1979, and published in 1980 (1st edition, reprinted 1988), is being revised to reflect the new circumstances of the communities. Each of our three monastic houses is equal in voice and governance, and each house has its own prior. Currently the community numbers 19 members in all. The monks have nine members, the nuns have seven members, while the companions number three (a married couple and a widow). Currently there is one novice with the nuns.

New Skete lives in the conviction that an authentic and vibrant monasticism is an essential ingredient of healthy Church life. By its nature, the monastic vocation is fully apostolic in itself. Through the balance and openness of its own way of life, it serves and challenges both the Church at large and the world to a broader vision and deeper experience of life; therefore, our primary responsibility is fidelity to the task of being authentic monastics. However, we believe this cannot be done merely by reproducing monastic life as it has been lived in the past, in other places and cultures. Creativity is an essential ingredient to any viable monasticism, and as monasticism always and by necessity incarnates itself in a particular cultural context, so, too, we are striving to express the mystery and dynamism of our vocation in a manner appropriate to our own culture and times.

# Monastic Communities

## Vision

Our vision is radically cenobitic, and is expressed most succinctly in our mission statement, as well as several pertinent passages from the 1988 edition of our Typicon:

“Our mission as Eastern Orthodox catholic 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...

“The monastic life has but one rule, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one goal, our salvation. Accordingly, the monks, nuns, and companions of New Skete are endeavoring to live the Christian life as fully as possible by becoming true disciples of the Gospel...

“Furthermore, as heirs of the primitive Christian monks and nuns, we want to live in harmony with their spirit, especially that of the Eastern monastic Fathers and Mothers, adopting and adapting our own everyday life from that parent tradition harmoniously and organically, so that we may manifest in our own lives the perennial nature of Orthodox Christian monasticism, especially for contemporary America, and indeed, for the whole Church... Though the emphasis may vary in monastic life at different times and places, our life depends first and foremost on the liturgical offices of each day. Thus, every aspect of our life receives its impetus and nourishment from the daily and seasonal celebrations of the Church...

“As monasteries, we hold in special esteem the virtue of hospitality. While our own means are limited, we will at all times extend to all the basic courtesies of Christian charity and hospitality...

“In the deserts of the old world, the first monks and nuns carried on the prophetic ministry of Israel in a renewed vigor. Thus, their lives bore witness to the essential Christian message before a civil and ecclesiastical world that often suffered from secularization, from political intrigue, expediency, and a generally exaggerated and inhuman structuralism. They were thereby reminders to all that the Gospel was a way of life to be sought by all through repentance that leads to the salvation meant for all...

“Thus, monasticism must strive to keep this goal in mind, for it must be the salt of society; and for this reason, if for no other, the monastery must be accessible to all, so that they may savor its life, its worship, and its message.”

## Community Life

This describes a monastic life that embraces a balanced rhythm of prayer, work, common life, and hospitality. Anchored in the daily cycle of Matins and Vespers (with Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feast days), we try to make ourselves available to all who come to the monastery, in a manner that is in keeping with our vocation. We estimate that more than 5,000 people from all sorts of religious backgrounds visit the monastery each year, either to make spiritual retreats, seek spiritual guidance, attend church services, visit the gift shops and grounds, or as dog customers. We also have an expanding network of volunteers who share in the work of the monastery.

All three houses receive guests, and our retreats are intended to immerse them in the daily rhythm of our monastic life. Staying a few days in a place of beauty, solitude, and silence, our guests are free to spend ample time in reflection and prayer. There are also opportunities for them to interact informally with the members of all three communities after worship and at meals. In addition, although the monastery is not a parish in any formal sense, there is a group of approximately 45 people who share regularly in our liturgical life. New Skete is also active in the St. Andrew’s Brotherhood, an association of Albany-area Orthodox clergy, and we annually host a Mission Sunday during Great Lent.

# Monastic Communities

Each of our monastic communities is self-supporting and receives no financial support from The Orthodox Church in America. Besides donations, we support ourselves by several businesses: New Skete Shepherds (dog breeding and training program), New Skete Farms (smoked meats, cheeses, and dog biscuits), New Skete Kitchens (gourmet cheesecakes and fruitcakes), Liturgy and Art (liturgical books and music, icon prints, and greeting cards), and several cottage industries (icon painting, dog beds, and guesthouse). In our work, we have tried to utilize the creative talents of our members in a way that not only pays the bills, but also bears witness to the monastic values by which we live. In this way, our work becomes a means of outreach.

## Major Projects and activities

For example, our breeding program is recognized worldwide as a model of its kind and affects the overall quality of life of many people. Our two best-selling books on dog care, *How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend* and *The Art of Raising a Puppy* (both published by Little, Brown & Co.), offer insight on the spiritual nature of dog/human relationships and practical wisdom in fostering such. In 1999, the community came out with a book on the spiritual life entitled *In the Spirit of Happiness*, and in 2002, *How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend* appeared in a new, completely revised edition. Most recently, we have published two new books: *I & Dog* (2003:Yorkville Press), a book of meditations on the spiritual dimension present in the human/dog relationship, and *Rise Up With a Listening Heart* (2004:Yorkville Press), a book of meditations on the theme of resurrection in everyday life. Some of our books have been published in Japanese, Czech, Korean, German, and Polish. We also have put out four CDs of our liturgical music.

Our many liturgical publications, published over a 35-year period and sung throughout those years at New Skete, continue to be an important resource for church renewal. The iconography, artwork, jewelry, and liturgical vestments coming out of the community have a reputation for beauty and excellence; and our food products are popular both in our immediate area and nationwide. Striving for the best in all that we do is a hallmark of our life and a vital means of spiritual growth. Nevertheless, we are aware that the mission of our community includes an expanding network of friends to share in our vision and charism. Recently, we have invited professionals concerned with the physical well-being and financial viability of the New Skete communities to help us adapt and respond to the challenges of life in the 21st century.

In 2002, the community finished Holy Wisdom Temple, and this year we have provided a handicapped-accessible bathroom. Holy Wisdom has become a space that reflects the community's vision of catholicity and its vocation to work for the unity of Christ's body.

Over the years New Skete has hosted inter-church and ecumenical conferences on subjects such as liturgical renewal and monastic life. In addition, we participate in the local Cambridge clergy association of Christian churches. At least once a year we publish a newsletter that is intended to stimulate reflection as well as keep us in touch with all of our friends and acquaintances. In recent years we have also been the subject of a number of television and radio programs or segments, and numerous national and international magazine and newspaper articles: NPR's *Morning Edition*, PBS, the BBC, *Good Morning America*, *CBS Saturday Morning*, *America at Worship*, and most recently, a feature article in the *Albany Times Union* that has been syndicated nationally and in Canada. People are always welcome to visit us over the internet ([www.newskete.com](http://www.newskete.com), [www.newsketemonks.com](http://www.newsketemonks.com), [www.newsketecompanions.org](http://www.newsketecompanions.org)).

Through each of these avenues, we have tried to bring a better awareness of Orthodox monasticism and the spiritual life to both the Church and general public, and to share the fruits of our life in a manner that harmonizes with the spirit of the contemplative life.