

*The  
Bethany  
Orthodox School  
For  
Girls*



*An Independent Appeal*

2022-2023

*Dan Koski - dankoski1979@gmail.com*

## *Dear Friends and Supporters of the Bethany Orthodox School for Girls,*

I write to you from Minnesota in the United States; my thirteen-year odyssey across the Holy Land and Europe has come to an unexpected end. It has also been three years since I left the Holy Land, a time which seems at present even more distant than it actually is due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These have not been easy times for any of us, and Bethany School has been no exception. This past spring, the School and Community of the Resurrection of Christ celebrated its third consecutive Paschal/Easter services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and while we at present seem to be heading towards a gradual wind-down of this global crisis, the tragedy in Ukraine presents a new challenge for Bethany. Pilgrims from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine will not return to the Holy Land anytime in the near future, depriving Bethany School of its primary source of donations. Our external donor base, existing almost entirely in North America, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia, has further obstacles to face with raising funds for Bethany in the current emotionally-charged climate.

For the last seven years, my primary role within the community of Bethany School has been to raise funds outside of the Russian-speaking world. Three years after my departure from the Holy Land, it remains the only volunteer project of many that I have been a part of through the last fourteen years, as well as the strongest connection that I retain from this pivotal, decade-long chapter of my life. When I began work with Bethany School, it was during the so-called Knife Intifada, one of the worst spates of violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank in recent memory. Much of my motivation to become so involved in Bethany School in a volunteer capacity over other similar options was my belief that the School remains a beacon of faith-based education that offers its students not only the practical knowledge and certificates to endure in the Holy Land, but also the means to think differently and perhaps more openly about their faith and identity, be it Christian or Muslim, in a land perpetually plagued by sectarian and national conflict. In the Holy Land as well as in Ukraine, Russia and elsewhere, that requires a level of constant care and cultivation that can be challenging, even exasperating, but is of greater value with each passing day.

This year, Bethany School celebrates eighty-five years of existence. It has been one of the greatest privileges of my life to have been a part of that existence, and I thank everyone who has contributed to that end so far. May you have a blessed summer.



*Dan Koski*

Dan Koski - [dankoski1979@gmail.com](mailto:dankoski1979@gmail.com)

The Feast of Saint John the Baptist,  
Summer 2021

## The Bethany Orthodox School for Girls

The Bethany Orthodox School for Girls is under the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission of Jerusalem of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, also known by its English-language acronym ROCOR. It is located below the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives in the biblical town of Bethany, in the neighborhood of Al-Azaria (the place of Lazarus in Arabic), a short distance from the tomb of Lazarus. The property was acquired and developed in the late 19th century up until the First World War as part of the expanding presence and imprint of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Holy Land. Originally serving as a pilgrim's house, it was seized as a garrison for Ottoman soldiers during the First World War and fell into neglect during the tumultuous years of the Jerusalem Mission following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Then in 1937, two Scottish women, former Protestant missionaries, who had converted to Orthodoxy and become tonsured nuns within the Jerusalem Mission, founded a boarding school for Palestinian Christian girls on the property. These extraordinary women, whose names we commemorate amongst the fallen asleep of this world as Mother Mary and Mother Martha, became the nucleus of the Community of the Resurrection of Christ in Bethany, alongside their sister communities at Ascension convent on Mount of Olives and Mary Magdalene convent on Gethemane.

Still more surprises awaited the small, austere community of the Jerusalem Ecclesiastical Mission. During construction of a new school building on the Bethany compound in the mid-20th century, a stone marker dated to the Byzantine Christian era was discovered that confirmed a chapel dedicated to the place where Christ met Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, and spoke the words recorded in John 11:25: *"I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."*

While the aim of the Sisters was to provide basic education and life skills for Palestinian Christian girls, they also preserved the tradition of pre-revolution Russian Orthodox mission schools in the Holy Land which, at one time present in practically every substantial Christian community, had completely disappeared at the start of the First World War, never to re-open. The School also became a standard in its own time for education of girls and young women, attracting students from across British Mandate Palestine and eventually, Israel-Palestine. Many School alumni went on to become some of the best-regarded educators and health practitioners in Palestine. A few Boarders chose to follow the path of monasticism and became tonsured monastics at either Ascension convent or Mary Magdalene convent, a tradition which has continued until the present day.



In the 1970s, a decision was made to restructure the School to become a private open enrollment for both Christian and Muslim girls from local families, while still accepting Christian boarders from across the Holy Land.

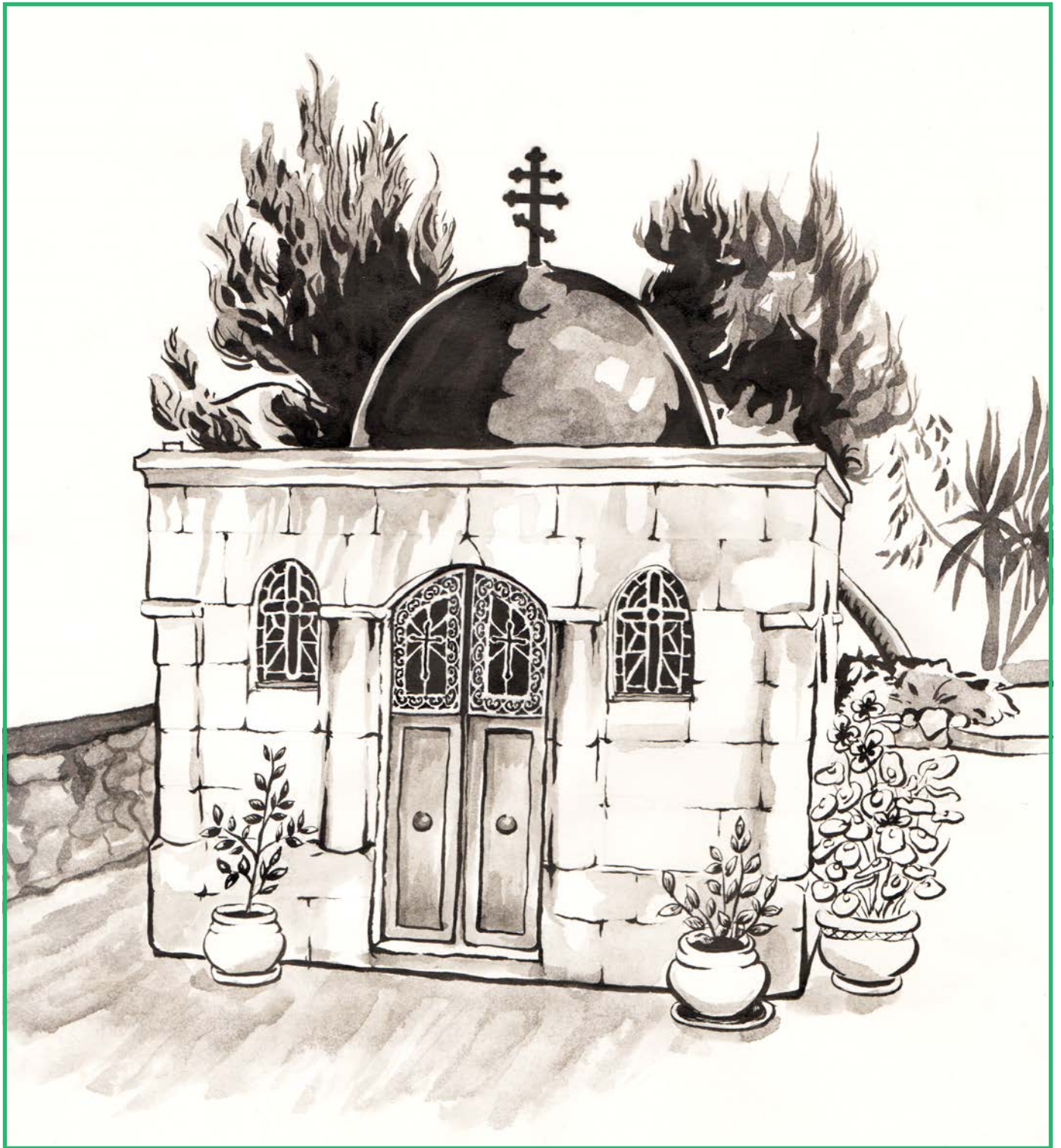
Today, the community is led by Mother Maria Wall who is fast approaching her fifteenth year in Bethany. Together with Archimandrite Roman Krassovsky, the Mission Head residing at Ascension Convent, Mother Elizabeth Smelic, Abbess of Mary Magdalene Convent, and His Eminence, Metropolitan Mark Arndt of Berlin and All Germany, Overseer of the Jerusalem Mission as appointed by the Synod of ROCOR, the School continues to function as a center of education, faith formation, a place of pilgrimage, community, home and place of refuge amidst life in the ever-challenging and often adversarial, Holy Land.



## About Bethany / Al Azaria

When the School was founded in 1937, the city of Bethany/Al-Azaria was nothing more than a sleepy stop on the Holy Land pilgrimage path; close but distinct from Jerusalem, inhabited by Palestinian Christian and Muslim families living alongside a handful of Orthodox and Catholic monastic communities. Today, Bethany is a highly congested, overpopulated suburb of Jerusalem. It is polluted, crime-ridden, broken and dispossessed through the Israel-Palestine conflict; nearly devoid of indigenous Christians. What began as a social project for Christian girls in need and placed in a dusty hillside village at the edge of the desert, has turned into an urban renewal project, providing the only sure-fire improvement of the quality of life in the deeply troubled community through education.

*Please note: for the sake of brevity, the terms **Bethany School** and **Community** will be used throughout this document. Photos courtesy of the **Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia** will be marked as **REMJ-ROCOR**. Watercolor images were created and donated by Amy, a friend of Bethany School. Please do not reuse these images without permission. Thank you to Henri, another friend of Bethany School, for his layout and graphics work once again, and Rev. David for his proofreading assistance.*



## Bethany School At A Glance

Founded: 1937

Location: Bethany/Al-Azaria, West Bank partition of East Jerusalem, designated Area C of the Palestinian Authority.

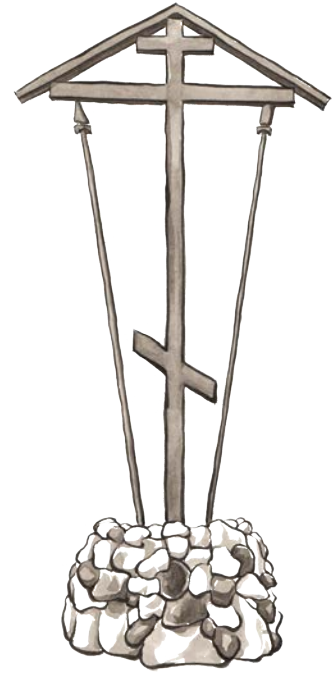
School Classification: Private open-enrollment for Palestinian girls, Kindergarten through 12th Grade. Considered a "Scientific Stream" Registered under the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority.

Approximate Number of Students for 2021-22: 450

Approximate Number of Boarders for 2021-22: Approximately 6 to 7

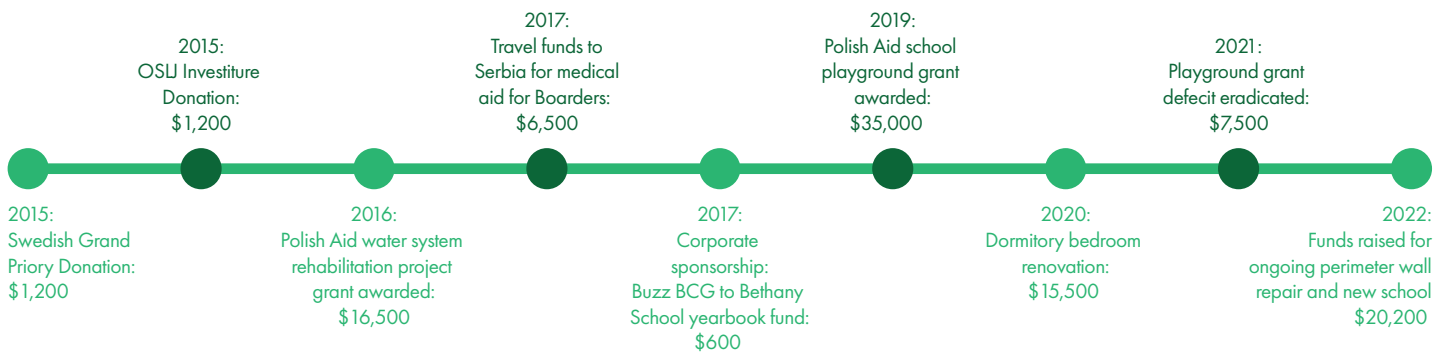
Principal: Mother Maria (Wall).

[www.bethany-community.org](http://www.bethany-community.org)



## An Overview of Personal Involvement with Bethany School

I began volunteering with Bethany School in 2014, first independently, then as a representative of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem (OSLJ), and at present, through the Sweden-based nonprofit, [Steps for Christianity](#). The following is a list of completed projects and funds raised to date: many smaller donations of material goods and volunteer services have been left out of this list for the sake of clarity, but are remembered in thought and prayer.



Total in donated funds, sponsorships and grants since 2014: \$104,500.00



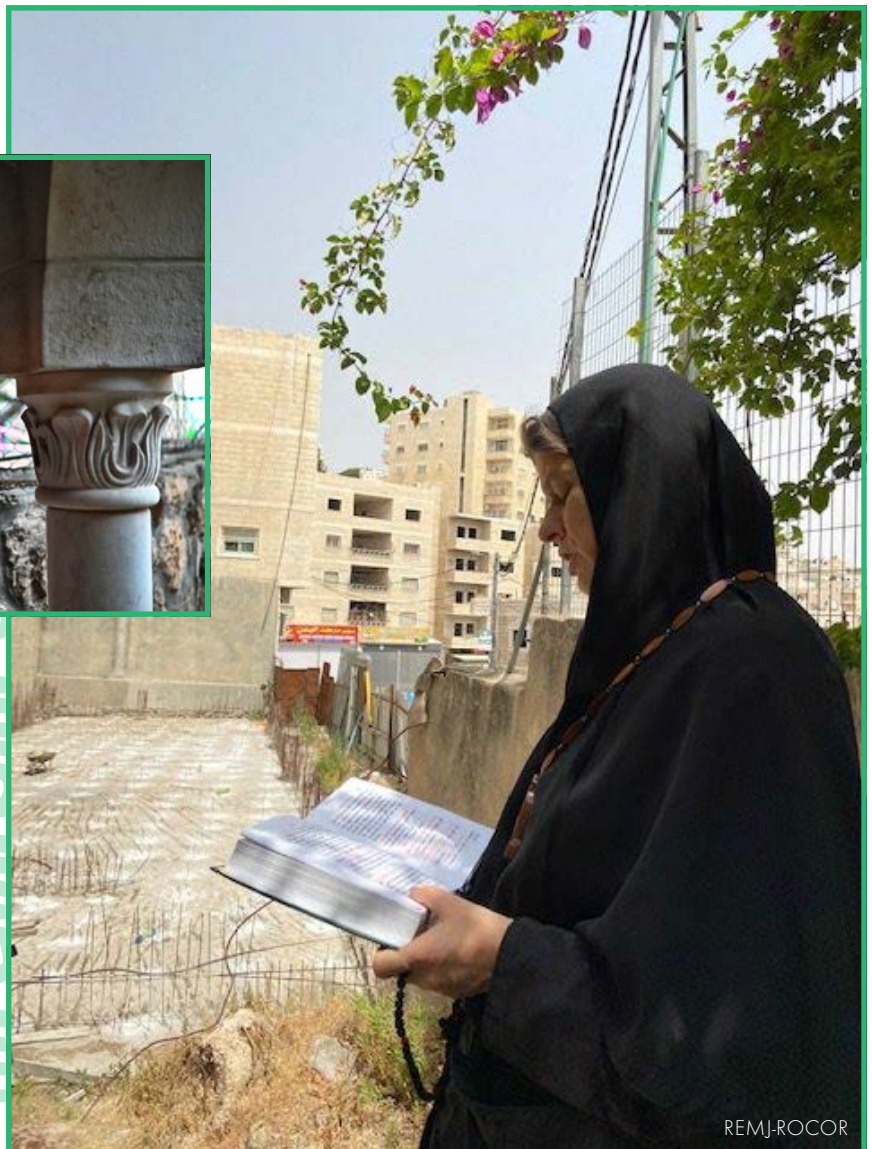
Wooden Paschal eggs painted by Boarders to assist with fundraising efforts.

## Ongoing Project: Perimeter Wall Repair and New School Gate Construction

Our present infrastructure project is now the renovation and completion of the northern perimeter wall and gate for the planned new school building, located on the northeast corner of the Community and School property.

In recent years, it became clear more classrooms, an indoor gymnasium and a carpark were needed. In addition, using the last open space of the School property became important to protect the space from encroaching parties. Funds for a foundation were procured, and concrete poured. Unfortunately, the project has been set back due to lack of additional funds to complete the first level of the structure, and the project has lain dormant for several years. The current situation must be urgently rectified to avoid undoing some of the foundational work that has been exposed for too long, and also to repair parts of the perimeter wall that were destroyed. In addition, a new gate must be built in the existing gap of the perimeter wall, which will allow access to school buses and personal vehicles to use the carpark.

Last year, we were able to raise **\$30,000** to begin construction on repairing the perimeter wall and the new gate. By mid-2022, we have raised approximately **\$20,200** towards our **\$30,000** goal. Following PayPal and bank transfer fees, we need **\$11,000** more to meet our pledge of **\$30,000** received. Our present target is to complete this amount by **December of 2023**.



# Perimeter Wall Repair and New School Gate Construction

Raised: \$20,200



Needed: \$11,000

Help us make our **\$30,000** goal with a **\$110.00** pledge!

1 pledge = 1% of needed funds

## Donation by Check from the United States

By check, you can make a direct donation to Bethany School via the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. To submit your donation, please send a US Bank check.

**Checks are written to: Orthodox School of Bethany**

**Notation in check: Boarding Section**

**Mailing address:**

**Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR)**

**Attn: Nicholas Ohotin - 75 E 93rd St - New York, NY 10128 - USA**

All US donations are tax deductible. When you have sent your check, please send an email to myself (Dan Koski) at [dankoski1979@gmail.com](mailto:dankoski1979@gmail.com) so I can track donations and assist with correspondence. If you wish for names to be commemorated for the donation, please list Living and Deceased in two separate lists, and indicate which names are those of baptized Orthodox Christians. (All names will be kept in memory; those of Orthodox Christians will be commemorated during liturgy)

## Donation by Internet from Anywhere in the World

From anywhere in the world via electronic donation, you can support Bethany School via the [Steps for Christianity Project](#). Simply go to the site and make your donation to the [Bethany School donation page](#). The Steps project will send 95% of all donations directly to Bethany; 5% will be kept for Paypal transfer fees, international wiring of the funds, and running costs of the website.

## Sponsor an Online Lecture

This past winter, I began offering online lectures for parishes and organizations that want to learn more about the Christian presence in the Holy Land. I have been giving these lectures for past 12 years, and can speak on a variety of different topics, ranging from the history of Christianity in the Holy Land, the Judean Desert Fathers, Saint George of Palestine, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Jerusalem and Holy Week, Bethlehem and the Nativity season, and others. My lectures last between 45 to 75 minutes with time for question and discussion. I ask for a honorarium of \$100 with the possibility of additional goodwill donations; both honorariums and donations will all go directly to our current Bethany School fund. The funds can be collected by either sending a check to the Bethany School fund at the ROCOR Synod in New York City, or via the [Steps for Christianity project](#).

## Notice on Fundraising

ROCOR, its Jerusalem Mission, and Bethany School retain administrative and financial independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. Bethany School does not have any formal association with the Moscow Patriarchate, its Holy Land mission and all Russian Federation-linked or aligned humanitarian organizations. All funds raised in the United States are collected through the US-registered Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in the United States, and all funds raised through our Paypal account will be sent directly to the Bethany Orthodox School. All funds are sent to Bethany School following deductions for collection and transfer fees. The travel costs of fundraising tours and hikes as well as any promotional expenses are absorbed by myself and other support staff.



# News from Bethany

## Community Support from BuzzBCG: Adolescent Feminine Wellness Education Program

This past spring, a regional supporter of Bethany School from Beit Jala offered to run an educational seminar on adolescent hygiene and feminine wellness for the older student classes. BuzzBCG founder and owner Rami El-Khatieb is a longstanding friend and supporter of Bethany School, and he facilitated his project staff to work with our School's sixth and seventh grade teachers for the one-hour educational program, which included presentations and promotional items. The project was a success, and BuzzBCG's continued support for the School during this extended period of considerable isolation was most appreciated.



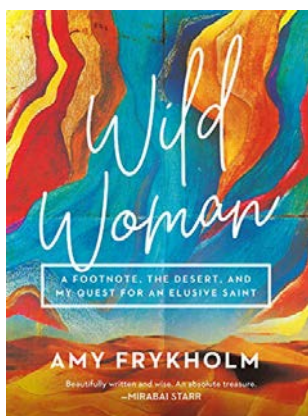
## Supporting our Supporters: Bruderhof Community

For the last six years, the Bruderhof Community has been a source of support for Bethany School, providing volunteers, offering hospitality at their communities, and extending practical support for our infrastructure projects. Bruderhof, a century-old Christian Intentional Community movement with over two dozen communities across the world, supports both its charitable work and its membership through communal businesses. Community Playthings, based in the state of New York, designs and produces quality handcrafted wood furniture and products for nurseries, kindergartens and elementary school classrooms, activity areas and playgrounds.



The products are of exceptional quality and a sound investment for schools, parishes, faith communities and households that prefer wood products to plastics, and value quality craftwork. Visit [Community Playthings](#) to review their existing product line and join their mailing list. Please remember to thank the Bruderhof Community for their continued support of Bethany School when making an order.

## New Christian Travelogue Book on Saint Mary of Egypt Includes Bethany School



In 2018, American Christian author and journalist Amy Frykholm visited the Holy Land as part of a three-nation journey in search of living traditions and the meaning of Saint Mary of Egypt. Her adventures and findings were chronicled in her latest book, **Wild Woman, A Footnote, the Desert, and My Quest for an Elusive Saint**. Part travelogue, part spiritual and theological reflection, **Wild Woman** is a journey through the Middle East that's both compelling and enjoyable to read.

During her stay in Jerusalem, Amy visited Bethany School and was impressed enough with the living testimony of Mother Maria and the Community to add the encounter into her book. The result is a delightful illustration in words of the living tradition of women's monasticism in the Holy Land.

**Wild Woman** is available through all major online book vendors, as a hardcover and e-publication. Support Bethany School by bringing this publication to your faith community, public library and elsewhere, and help share the story of Bethany School to a larger audience. You can contact Amy Frykholm via her personal website at [amyfrykholm.com](http://amyfrykholm.com) as well as follow her social media.

## Mass of Thanksgiving for Bethany Donors on the Feast of the Annunciation

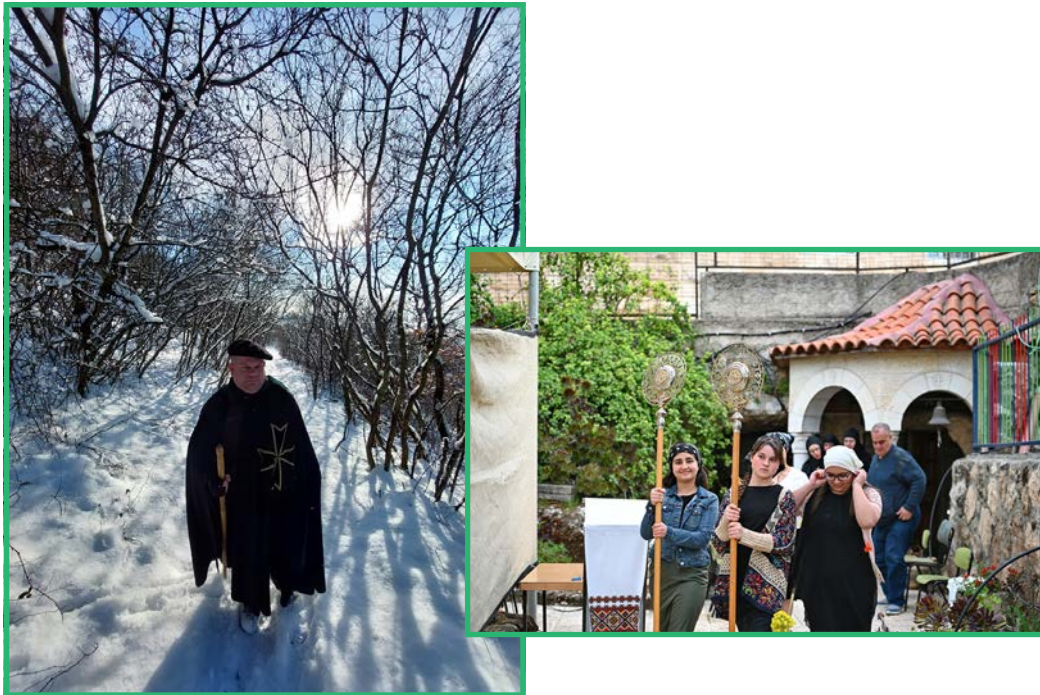
On March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation, a mass was said for the donors and patrons of the Bethany Orthodox School for Girls at St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church in Abermain, New South Wales, Australia, with Fr. James Lunn presiding.

All of our donors are appreciated and commemorated in private prayer, regardless of their denominational affiliation or religious faith. We are thankful to Fr. James Lunn for having organized this mass especially as the number of Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant donors has increased in recent years!



## A Pilgrimage to the Hill of Crosses: Make a Pledge

This coming autumn, I will be journeying to Lithuania to complete a [Steps for Christianity](#) fundraising pilgrimage at the Hill of Crosses near the northern city of Šiauliai. The Hill of Crosses includes more than 100,000 crosses and other Christian devotional pilgrimage tokens. This one-day hike is part of a larger planned week of meetings and advocacy for the Steps project in Sweden and Finland. As of the summer of 2021, the Steps initiative has collected just over \$15,000 for Bethany School and have completed two hikes in the regions of Banat and Transylvania, in Romania for a total of 50,000 steps towards our overall goal of eight million steps for the Holy Land. Starting in 2023, I will also be conducting one fundraising hike per year in the United States. For more information, and to donate, please visit [Steps for Christianity](#).



## Saint Elizabeth the New Martyr: Faith in Difficult Times

Saint Elizabeth Feodorovna the New Martyr was born Princess Elisabeth of Hesse and by Rhine in the city of Darmstadt, Grand Duchy of Hesse, in what is now part of the modern state of Hesse in Germany in 1864. A granddaughter of Queen Victoria, her family was considered an important noble family, known for providing suitable children for royal marriages but was also noted for their piety and modest living. As a young woman, she was considered one of the most eligible bachelorettes of the age; her suitors included the future Emperor of Germany. Eventually marrying the Grand Duke Sergei, younger brother of Emperor Alexander III of Russia, she left her known world for the imperial court of St. Petersburg, later joined by her sister, Princess Alix, best known to history as Empress Alexandra.

Choosing to convert to the Orthodox faith on her own accord, she took a vow of monasticism and founded the Convent of Martha and Mary in Moscow following the assassination of her husband by a terrorist bombing in 1905. From then on, she became known simply as Mother Elizabeth. Her convent was best known for engaging in social works among the poor and destitute in Moscow, later becoming well known for the care of soldiers wounded during the First World War. Following the October Revolution of 1917, the convent was closed, and the sisters dispersed with all but one (Sister Barbara) forcibly separated from her. In 1918, Mother Elizabeth and Sister Barbara were sent to the

Ural city of Alapayevsk along with six others, five of them high-ranking members of the Russian nobility. On the evening of July 18th, Mother Elizabeth and her fellow prisoners were taken to an abandoned mine shaft and executed by a combination of physical blows with an implement and being thrown down the deep shaft. This horrific act of murder was conducted as part of a larger operation to eliminate the nobility by the Bolsheviks at the start of the Russian Civil War; her sister, Empress Alexandra, along with her husband Emperor Nicholas II, and their five children were almost simultaneously murdered in a cellar in the nearby city of Yekaterinburg by another Bolshevik execution squad.

Soon after her death, the bodies of Mother Elizabeth, Sister Barbara, and the six others were retrieved and laid to rest by the anti-Bolshevik White Army forces in the local cathedral. As the fortunes of the Russian Civil War turned in favor of the Red Army, the remains of both Mother Elizabeth and Sister Barbara would be transferred further east to avoid being desecrated, until they arrived first in Shanghai, China, and then were transported to Jerusalem, British Mandate Palestine, where in 1921, they were laid to rest in the Church of Mary Magdalene on Gethsemane, which Mother Elizabeth, as a young Grand Duchess with her husband the Grand Duke Sergei, had visited as representatives of the Romanov Imperial family during its construction. (The church was erected in memory of Empress Maria Alexandrovna, mother of Grand Duke Sergei and grandmother of Tsar Nicholas II). The church became a convent in 1936, a year prior to the founding of Bethany School, a short distance away on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Mother Elizabeth and Sister Barbara were canonized as saints by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in 1981; this sainthood is now universally recognized by the Orthodox Church as well as the Anglican Church. The relics of both saints lie within the nave of the church to the left and right of the iconostasis, where they are cared for by the sisters of the convent and have been venerated by faithful from across the world who journey to Jerusalem as part of their pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The life of Saint Elizabeth was a pilgrimage in itself; she possessed great beauty, intelligence, personality, and capabilities, yet her path was marked by immense struggles, hardships, and deprivations of that which mattered most to her. It was well within her means to become the Empress of Germany, her native land, as was the choice to either retire to her homeland or remain as a reclusive Dowager-Duchess following the murder of her husband. It is possible that she could have leveraged her resources and influence to leave Russia between the abdication of Emperor Nicholas II and the Bolshevik Revolution. Yet Saint Elizabeth chose the path of service and faith whenever faced with either temptation of worldly pleasures or release from worldly pains, remaining steadfast to those in her care even during the First World War, as the two nations she called home were at war with one another and revolutionaries spread slanders and lies against her. That her relics are at Gethsemane in Jerusalem, the place where Christ awaited His Passion, is, without doubt, a sign that her work in preparing for the Kingdom of Heaven is not yet completed.

The monastic Sisters and Boarders of the Bethany Orthodox School for Girls attend Divine Liturgy at Mary Magdalene convent each Sunday, graced by the presence of the relics of both Saint Elizabeth and Saint Barbara. Furthermore, Saint Elizabeth converted to the Orthodox faith on Lazarus Saturday, drawing her yet closer to the Bethany community as a sister in Christ, on the day that Lazarus of Bethany was raised from the dead after Christ spoke to Mary and Martha, stating:

***I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. (John 11:25)***

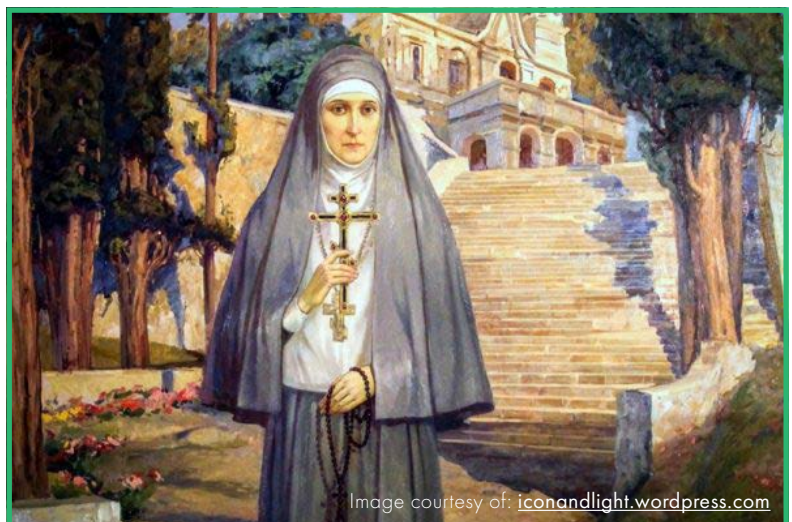


Image courtesy of: [iconandlight.wordpress.com](https://iconandlight.wordpress.com)