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Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians

# In Community

## A Million Steps: Two Pilgrims on **The Way** of St. James

by Mary Alice Cook

St. James (in Spanish *Santiago*) was the evangelizer of Spain and the first of the Lord’s disciples to die. In 44 A.D., St. James was residing in Jerusalem, where he was martyred at the hands of King Herod. Later, the stone coffin containing his body was placed on a ship bound for Spain, but the ship was wrecked and the coffin lost. Tradition teaches that the coffin drifted on the sea to Finistera, where monks buried it. Over time, the grave was forgotten, until a shepherding monk had a vision of a field of stars (*campus stellae*), which guided him to the Apostle’s grave. Today, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela stands at the site of the grave, and draws pilgrims from all over the world. Two of St. John’s parishoners,

with tuna, meat, potatoes, pasta, dessert, and wine for dinner. The wine was always good, and always red. Some of the many monasteries and churches along The Way provide food and beds for pilgrims.

“Facilities” on the Camino, says Mark, are a mixed bag. At Burgos, a luxurious albergue provides weary pilgrims with leather couches, marble floors, and hot showers. In other places (which are best forgotten) the traveler finds thin mats on a stone floor, which is not nearly as uncomfortable as encountering the occasional innkeeper who suffers with psychiatric problems. The most welcoming albergues are those hosted by former pilgrims whose kindness springs from their desire to serve others who are making the same journey.

The Way, like life itself, varies in its quality. Some stretches...are paved and smooth; others are steep and strewn with boulders.

The Way, like life itself, varies in its quality. Some stretches, Gale recalls, are paved and smooth; others are steep and strewn with boulders. Occasionally, small creeks must be forded. He and David had only one bad day, during which David suffered from an intestinal virus that had afflicted many other pilgrims, while Gale coped with the pain of a kidney stone. On that rainy, windy day they walked the longest stretch of road on which there were no travelers’ services – fourteen miles. While waiting for David to finish throwing up on the side of the road, Gale saw a small, hand-lettered sign hanging from a tree: “Don’t quit before the miracle.”

Gale Armstrong and Mark Agnew, have, at separate times and in different ways, traversed the **Camino de Santiago**. Each has his own unique story.

Last April Gale, along with his son David, walked the 500 miles from St. Jean Pried de Porte (France) to Santiago de Compostela, and then another 50 miles to the Atlantic Ocean. April, May, and October he says, are good times to go; the weather is mild then and the route relatively uncrowded. By late June, the road is almost full, and in August – when the pilgrims are mostly Spaniards – the heat is daunting.

Along The Way, communities of pilgrims come together, sometimes walking at the same speed, at other times drifting apart. Typically, one pilgrim first asks another for his name and where he is from. Other questions, such as his occupation, come later. Mark, who traveled the Camino in remembers Simone, an 80 year old retired farmer from Belgium who walked the Camino every year with her husband and son. After their deaths she honors them by continuing to make the annual pilgrimage on her own. Gale met many pilgrims who were experiencing life changes, who were either starting or finishing a stage of life. He recalls meeting a middle-aged Irish woman, a chain smoker who invited herself to dinner with Gale and David. Helen, it turns out, is a barrister who represents the European Union and mediates international disputes. The oldest pilgrim Gale met was in his 80’s, and he observed a 76 year old architect making sketches of buildings along The Way.

Along The Camino are *albergues* – hostels – at which wayfarers find food (usually simple) and a place to sleep (usually bunk beds). Gale describes the typical “pilgrim’s menu” at the albergues: bread for breakfast, and green salads



Gale Armstrong at one of the many stops along The Way.

From My Corner of Monastery Drive  
Mary Alice Cook



As we are putting together this issue of In Community, it is early October, and our beautiful, brief Alaskan fall is giving way to winter. Bill and I spent a good part of the summer clearing our property of trees felled in the wind storms and ice storms of the last few years. Occasionally, even as we worked, the wind blew strongly, bending branches and causing flowers to lie prostrate on the ground, as if overcome by grief. One day, the blue sky turned suddenly gray, and the warm breeze became a chill wind. As it grew stronger, remembering the destruction of past storms, I felt uneasy, even afraid, fearing that exposed as we were, a large branch or small tree could knock us flat.

But the sun soon returned and the wind diminished. My soul felt light again, and happy to be outdoors. How, I wondered later, could my brief unease that day compare to the terror felt by people watching the approach of a typhoon, tsunami, or tornado? Jesus' disciples, several of whom were fishermen, were also familiar with the power of a high wind. The Gospels tell of times when they feared for their lives as they rode out the storms in their little boat.

I have been told that high winds do less damage to trees during winter, because they are more firmly rooted in the frozen ground, and are bare of leaves, allowing the winds to pass with less resistance through their branches. Perhaps we are no different – were we to remain more firmly rooted in our faith in God and our belief in His promises, and more free of the trappings of life that interfere with our ability to recognize His presence, we could better understand and withstand the adverse winds, great and small, that blow through our lives. In our Lord's own words, found in the gospel of St. Matthew, "...the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."

**The Greatest Commandment: Loving God and Neighbor**

Our own Sydney Medders wrote this speech and delivered it during the Oratorical competition at the Archdiocesan Family Life Conference in San Francisco last summer, where she won first place. Her coach was Katy Arvidson. The theme of the 2014 competition was "Love the Lord-Love Your Neighbor." Sydney's life goals are "to finish college, get married, and find a job where I can help as many people as I can."

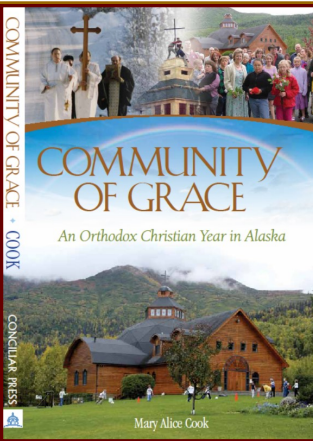
**Congratulations, Sydney!**

Every sincere Christian has asked: How do I inherit eternal life? The Lord answers this question: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27) That is the key He gave us to reach heaven's gates. It seems simple, but fulfilling His greatest of commandments can be arduous.

The Ancient Greeks used four words to distinguish the different types of love. The last of the four is *agape*. C.S Lewis, in *The Four Loves*, explains *agape* as the highest form of Christian love and it is translated as "unconditional love." It is a love with no limitations. Jesus tells us to *strive* towards this type of love. God loves us with *no limits* and we should return it in the same way. He loves us no matter what we do, think or say. He loves us for the good in us, and the bad. He will *never* stop loving us. We don't realize how amazing that is; to be loved by someone *unconditionally*. For me, it will be a lifelong journey learning how to love God, and in order to begin, I need to answer the question: how *do* I love Him with my heart, soul, strength, and mind, and how do I properly love myself in order to love others?

Jesus first commands us to love Him with our hearts. Our hearts control our emotions and feelings. I need to focus myself on being happy, kind, caring, loving, and giving, and not acting in the wrong ways. God wants us to put our emotions into actions. To do this, I could give back more to people, and to my church, share with others, and make my happiness contagious. You will soon find out how easily you can affect others, but don't let negative emotions take over. They can bring you, and others, down quicker than you will realize. Usually, I find myself feeling jealous, or angry, or being disrespectful. It is a struggle for me to feel kindness and generosity toward everyone, and to act on those emotions daily. I need to focus more on changing my attitude, so that others can be positively affected by me. If I don't, it will limit my loving God fully, and it will take time away from sharing my love with the people around me. He wants us to act with *love* in our hearts, and to show it. "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-3).

Now, to love with all my *soul*. According to Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, "the term soul refers both to the spiritual element in our existence and to life itself." Our souls aren't just one section of ourselves; our souls are who we *are*, who we will *become*, what we *do*, how we *think*, how we *act*, and how we are *spiritually*. We need to love God with every *corner* of ourselves, and give God our *un-*



**Community of Grace** is a book written by Mary Alice Cook about the community of St. John in Eagle River, Alaska

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conditional love. We can do this by loving Him with our decisions, and our lifestyles. When I need to make a big decision, I must ask myself: Is this the *best possible* way to a good, Christian lifestyle? Will this put me in the right direction to God? For example, I try hard to stay away from all the sinful things that can tug me down. We young people sometimes act like we are invincible, and that nothing, and no one can stand in our way. I know that with that attitude, I won't get far in life, or with God. We need to listen to the *better* part of our conscience. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the ungodly... But his will is in the law of the Lord." (Psalm 1)

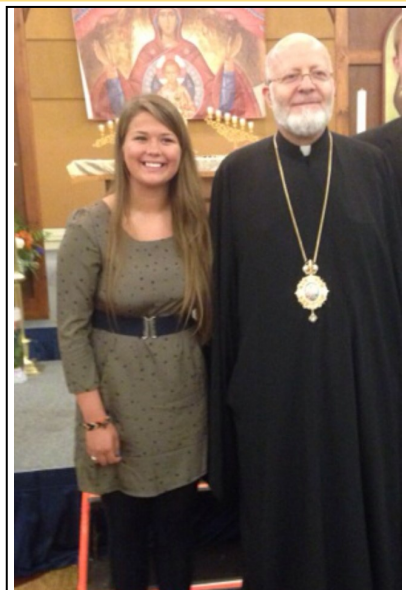
Our third task is to love God with our strength. This means to love Him with all our *might*, and to bear our crosses throughout life. When we think about strength, most of us think about bodily strength, but we need to think of internal strength as well. Internally, I show my love to Him by fasting and praying. Externally, I strengthen and train what my eyes, ears, mouth, feet, and hands do. Loving God with our strength means loving Him with what we *do*, inside and out. Every day there will be obstacles in our way of loving God, and we need to strengthen ourselves both internally and externally, to be able to jump over them. Think of the *strength* Jesus had when he picked up his cross, and carried it up the mountain to be crucified for *our sins*. His strength is the epitome of what we should strive to follow. We need to pick up all of our crosses, and follow Him. We may fall down, but we must pick ourselves up again. If we look to God he will help us. "I can do all things through God who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

Next, is to love with all my mind. The mind is defined as "the element of a person that enables him to be aware of the world, and his experiences, to think, and to feel." So loving God with my mind means that I love Him even in my thoughts. Among other people, we may act in ways that show our love for God, but what about when we're usually go straight to thinking alone? I don't usually go straight about God. My icon wall, and that I hear the church bells every day, remind me that God ority in my should be the primind. I once asked a priest what I should do when my thoughts are going in a bad direction. He said the best way is to say the Lord's Prayer, or to repeat "Lord have mercy upon me a sinner." Now, I say that every time, and it has helped *tremendously*. This means I can't let my mind go on a crazy rollercoaster of thoughts, and only happen to think of God every now and then. Again, Saint Paul says in Philippians (4:8) "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true... whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue, and if *there is* anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things."

The rest of the key that our Lord gives us to the gate of heaven is this: To love our neighbor as ourselves. As teenagers it can sometimes be challenging to love ourselves. Society

As a teenager it can be, at times, very challenging to love ourselves. We are given an image by society showing us how we should look, act, and feel.

shows us an image of how we should look, act, and feel. We follow that image, and are continuously disappointed with the outcome. Don't follow what others say to do. Also, when we look back on all the wrong we have committed, we wonder how someone can love us for our faults too. We need to remember the good qualities in ourselves, and not hate ourselves for the bad ones. There are going to be many times



Sydney Medders with Metropolitan JOSEPH in San Francisco

where we mess up along the way, but God loves us no matter what. Learn from your mistakes and work harder to be a better person for Him.

If we cannot have strength to love ourselves, how can we have enough strength to love our neighbors? And who does God mean when He says "our neighbors?" Does he mean the people next door? Yes, but He also means our friends and family, people we pass on the street, the homeless, the rich, the poor, and even the people we hate. We are asked to spread the endless amount of love God has given us. It can be as simple as a smile. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said "Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love." Treat *others* as you would treat *God*. Give everyone the unconditional love He gives you. "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law". (Romans 13:8)

St. Herman of Alaska said, "I, a sinner, have tried to love God for more than forty years, and I cannot say that I perfectly love Him." He went on to say, "If we love someone, then we always think of that one, we strive to please that one; day and night our heart is preoccupied with that object." I need to love Him with my positive emotions, and feelings, with my actions, with who I am, with my internal and external strength, and with my thoughts. *Love is action*. Love Him with everything you *do*, whether it be praying, tithing, fasting, or giving to others. Love God unconditionally, because He loves us with no limits. And let this love overflow to every person around us. "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16).

## Summer and Fall Activities for 2014



July 6 - Fr. Robert Polson concelebrated with Fr. Tom Frizelle (not pictured) at the wedding of Lindsey McDonald and Noah Arvidson



Anna Curry and Abraham Labrada were joined in marriage on August 31



Reader Nectarios Yangson from Hawaii, Fr. Anthonasius Kone (St. Silouan's, Walla Walla, WA.), Fr. Marc Dunaway, Fr. Dimitri Jakimowicz (St. Herman of Alaska, Sunnyvale, CA), Dn. Dan Gray & Fr. Tom Frizelle with the "HAWAIIAN" MYRRH-STREAMING IVERON ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.



August 17 - The joyous day for the baptism of Amy Jenkins (left) and her three daughters, Greta, Jana and Katya.

## A Look Back

by Mary Alice Cook

In 1967 six Roman Catholic nuns made their home at what is today the St. James House in the St. John's Cathedral community. They were members of the Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood, a contemplative, cloistered Order. The Sisters hosted meetings and retreats at their convent, welcomed guests who needed a place to stay, and maintained their cycle of prayers and services. In 1970, the lack of a dependable water supply forced the Sisters to move to another home in Anchorage.

In August, one of those six sisters saw her old convent home for the first time in 44 years. Rosemary Marto, who lives in Illinois and is no longer a nun, along with her niece, Bonnie Cavanaugh, visited the St. John's community. Their tour of the St. James House brought back memories of the place where a group of young women lived, worked, prayed, and served God together. Rosemary and Bonnie returned to St. John's for Liturgy the following Sunday, and later, Rosemary wrote to Fr. Marc:

*I want to thank you for the warm welcome while I was visiting in Alaska. The service, Baptism, and reception on Sunday was inspirational and memorable. I like to think that the time we [the nuns] spent in the "Big House" in prayer and community will inspire many generations to give all to God.*

*Your community surrounding your magnificent Cathedral is unforgettable...this must be the way the first Christians witnessed to Christ's coming and witness[ed] to the world.*



Bonnie with Kh. Christine Rogers, Rosemary Martin, Fr. Marc Dunaway and two of Kh. Christine's children, Gregory and Meghan



Rosemary once a Catholic nun of the Precious Blood, in the living room of the St James House.

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## Making Disciples of All Nations by Sally Eckert

Two missionary families presented a wonderful Eagle River Institute over the first five days of August at St. John's. Fr. Nicholas and Mtka. Anastasia Harris who came to Alaska in 1967 and now have retired in Florida, presented highlights of what they call their "golden years" in the field. Fr. David and Mtka. Rozanne Rucker defined the mission field as prescribed in the scriptures and known to them through their experience as children of missionaries and their present assignment to Guatemala through the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). The perspectives of these two couples – one presenting principles of Christian mission, the other told in historical illustration – complemented each other perfectly.

Fr. Nicholas was ordained in September, 1961; not long after that his and Mtka. Anastasia's prayers to serve as missionaries were answered, and they moved from Pittsburgh to Anchorage, where they started a small mission church on Turpin Street. Fr. Nick's Anchorage congregation worshipped in the basement while the building was completed. In those early days, there were 15 priests serving in Alaska with one elderly priest serving occasionally in Anchorage. Today the OCA has 42 priests and 9 deacons serving the Church in Alaska; there are 12 priests in the greater Anchorage area and one assigned as hospital chaplain, and there are 8 churches in the immediate area.

Besides Anchorage, Fr. Nick regularly served parishes in Chenega, Cordova, Dillingham, Eklutna, and Fairbanks. He traveled to several far flung towns, including Juneau, for funerals, baptisms, and weddings. His ministry also expanded into nursing homes, prisons, and mental and substance abuse facilities.

In fulfilling the missionaries' calling (and our own as well) to be "fishers of men," Fr. David pointed out that our "tackle" is belief in the theology of the Incarnation within the context of the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit, he stressed, has been working with people before the missionary's arrival; each prospective convert is "holy ground," and should be treated as such. The discipler must know "what love looks like" to the one he disciples, because these are the things the discipler will then do to demonstrate his – and Christ's – love.

The good news we share must be expressed in living tradition, and Fr. David illustrated this principle with a story of a people for whom the word "sin" had been translated as "crime." These people lived essentially good lives, and could readily understand that translation as an apt description of the reality of their fallen nature. Making disciples calls for placing



Mtka. Rozanne and Fr. David visit Eklutna cemetery

people into right relationship with God, in order to heal the brokenness that exists among people, especially in marriage and family relationships. This, said Fr. David, is good news that resonates powerfully with the experience of converts.

Fr. David pointed out that his audiences often expect that he will ask them for



Fr. Vasilli Hillhouse, (priest at the Greek parish), Fr. Nicholas Harris, Fr. David Rucker and Fr. Marc Dunaway visiting at the newly built Greek church in Anchorage

money. While that is an essential need, he boldly stated, "I didn't come to ask for your money; I came to ask for your children!" Evangelism, he explained, calls for one-on-one relationships. The family is a "little church," where parents are called to make disciples by observing a sacramental life, and by modeling the beliefs that we profess. St. John Chrysostom taught that "fathers who bring up their children in the proper way are builders of temples for the Holy Spirit."

Finally, Fr. David cautioned against taking the spiritual culture from one country and forcefully transplanting it upon another, a practice which can be disastrous. He emphasized that the spiritual culture of a new country must grow authentically from the culture where it has been planted. This principle was illustrated by the long list of helpers and supporters who made the pilgrimage with Fr. Nick and his family through their years in Alaska – Native regalia makers, fur skin seamstresses, Aleut basket weavers and dancers, craftsmen of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and CEO's of native corporations – to name only a few.

Finally, the respect and love for the people served by these missionary families was evident in their sharing of the personal details of everyday life and in the humorous banter between husbands and wives as they remembered their years together. Both families have exquisite musical gifts that were shared as the Harris led their Institute audience in singing "Many Years!" in a number of Alaska Native dialects. The Ruckers sang "How Great Thou Art" as a beautiful duet in Spanish.

Christ's Great Commission could not be carried out without faithful missionaries who are willing to give their time, energy, and lives to it. We are not "Church" without making disciples of all men in the manner and place where God calls each of us to serve, whether at home or in other places around the world. And as we serve in our local parishes, let us be willing to support missions around the world with our resources and our prayers for God's blessing and protection on them. As our missionary friends counseled, let us ask God *to break our hearts* for those whom He wishes us to serve!

## A Million Steps... (Continued from page 1)

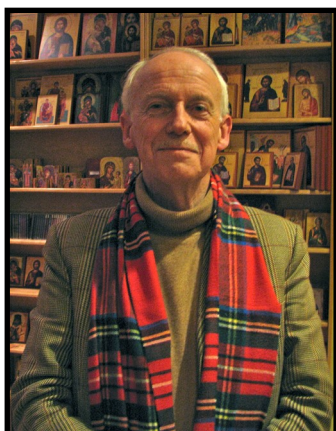


Gale and David

Somebody come up with a caption or location I can add to this space.

Mark also recalled a windy, rainy day near Pamplona, famous for its running of the bulls. He ascended the Alto del Perdon ridge through glutinous mud but, arriving at the summit, the wind and rain gave way to sunshine, pink gravel replaced the mud, and rolling green meadows lay ahead. Like Spain itself, The Way encompasses a land of contrasts.

Among the many signposts, markers, and monuments the pilgrim passes, one of the most beloved is the Cruz de Ferro, a simple iron cross that rises above a mountain of stones. Each passing pilgrim leaves at the foot of this cross a stone brought from his homeland, and prays for encouragement and protection as he completes his journey. Gale left a smooth white stone he picked up from the beach near St. Nilus Monastery on St. Nilus Island, near his home on Spruce Island.



Mark Agnew

Mark eloquently described the end of his journey, his visit to the crypt of St. James, which features a traffic light to prevent a bottleneck of pilgrims in the small space: *“The green light indicates that there is space and solitude. This holy place has witnessed prayers offered by millions of fellow Christians. There is an intense energy here, like standing in a strong wind. Something long planned for this moment becomes irrelevant. The pilgrim is revealed as that which he has always been, an insignificant nanoparticle among the galaxy of believers.”*

Why do thousands of people from all over the world make this pilgrimage? Mark, who travelled parts of The Way three different years, says there are as many reasons as there are pilgrims. Clergy and religious are joined by serious, secular walkers, singing Germans, happy families on holiday, and the “lamentably unprepared.” High schoolers celebrate spring break by walking the last 100 kilometers to Santiago. Gale’s goal was to be “personally, physically, and spiritually stretched.” At the end of the Camino, which is estimated to be a million steps, Gale realized that his relationships with other pilgrims had become deeper as they progressed, that he felt healthier and in better shape than at the beginning. His wife Robin notices that since his return from Spain, Gale is “more spiritual, more loving, more stable” than before.

The Camino is by no means a strictly serious undertaking. Mark laughed when he recalled his friend Jose, an experienced long distance walker, who planned an ‘alternative Camino’ for his nonathletic co-workers. He and his group flew to Santiago and assembled on the Camino, which passes directly in front of the passenger terminal at the airport. They then walked five kilometers to the Cathedral. One of the walkers said completing this journey was the greatest achievement of her life.

Whether one starts from Geneva, Melbourne, New York, or Eagle River, says Mark, like the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, St. James honors the intention of each and rewards his sacrifice.

Given a week’s rest, Gale decided at the end of his journey, he would gladly have started all over again.



Gale and David Armstrong

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## *Saints Mary and Martha*

*By Mary Ann Northey*

Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, are spoken of in the Gospels. We know that Martha was an involved hostess, offering the use of their home and busy with preparations to ensure a good time together. We see her at work in St. Luke's gospel, asking Christ to instruct Mary, who sat at His feet, to help her with the work of preparation. He told her that it was very important to listen to what He was saying, and that Mary was right to keep her attention there. In St. John's account, Lazarus became ill and they sent for Christ, expecting Him to heal their brother. When He arrived after Lazarus died, Martha complained to Him about His timing. At His question about her belief in His ability to resurrect the dead, she said she believed He could raise Lazarus from death, though she was unsure how and when it would happen. She also made a statement of faith similar to that of St. Peter, declaring her belief that He was "The Christ," indicating that she was paying attention to what was happening and not just being busy with hospitality. She spoke to Christ in a very forthright way, revealing a very close relationship with Him. We also see how deeply Mary loved Him, when she anointed His feet with expensive oils and dried them with her hair.

Think of this. We know these things are true of the sisters because they are recorded in the Bible. Tradition tells us other things about these early, active women of the Church. They are believed to be among the women who went to Christ's tomb with oils to anoint His body and among that first group to find Him risen. As a result, they are also named "Myrrh bearers." Tradition teaches that they spent the rest of their lives as missionaries and evangelists, traveling eventually to Cyprus with their brother Lazarus, where he became a bishop and where all three died. Their memories are celebrated on June 4, with their brother Lazarus. They are also celebrated in the Pascal season on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women.

Many years ago, our own Kh. Barbara Dunaway called the women of Saint John's the "Mary and Marthas." She named our social space in the basement "Bethany," and many men of Saint John's who helped us with our social and hospitality efforts were called "Lazarus."

*Saints Mary and Martha, Help us to value and exercise the gift of hospitality, and not to neglect listening for the Teacher's words.*



Mary Martha icon written/  
painted by Mary Ann Northey