

Volume 2, Issue 3

SUMMER 2006



Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians  
**In Community**

## ***Saint James House The Older Brother of Saint John Cathedral***

***By Father Marc Dunaway***

At the center of Saint John's Community is the Saint James House, the ministry that eventually gave birth to a parish and a Cathedral. This house was built in the early 1960's by a local school teacher named Howard Despain. At the west end of the house a large open patio, above the garage, was a site for parties and square dances. But the Good Friday earthquake in 1964 caused the well on the property to dry up and Mr. Despain sold the house to another man by the name of McMahan, who drilled additional wells, then buried a railroad car in the front yard as a holding tank in an attempt to provide adequate water for the house. When Mr. McMahan died in 1967 his wife gave the house to the Catholic Church, and for two years it became home to a small group of Catholic nuns. The water problem forced the nuns to sell the house in 1970 to a man named Dick Metz.

During the spring of 1972 Fr. Harold and Barbara Dunaway, who were then living at 405 Fern Street in Anchorage, decided they needed a larger house to accommodate the young people who were hanging around their home and often spending the night on the basement floor. They bought the lot next door with the idea of build-

ing an adjoining house. As spring came on the young men who were with them began to dig a basement in the frozen earth using picks and shovel and a motorcycle helmet to protect them from the flying debris. By summer, however, plans changed. Fr. Harold and Barb decided there might be some advantage to being far enough out of town that the less serious would find it more difficult to drop in and crash with no warning. The model they held before them was the Christian community in Switzerland described in the book, *L'Abri*, by Edith Schaeffer.

Later that summer two friends and Anchorage businessmen, Gaylon Calvert and Earl Stenehjem, were flying a small plane over Eagle River and spotted the large house. "This is perfect," they thought, "for the Dunaways." They later discovered that the property had recently been for sale, but that an agreement was pending for it to be bought and turned into a skeet shooting range. This agreement soon fell through, though, and the Dunaways went to see the property. They too agreed the location was perfect and the price was good, \$64,000 for the house and five acres. Things were run down, however. A dead caribou hung in a tree. The



Summer 1983



Winter 1987

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# Community Cooks:

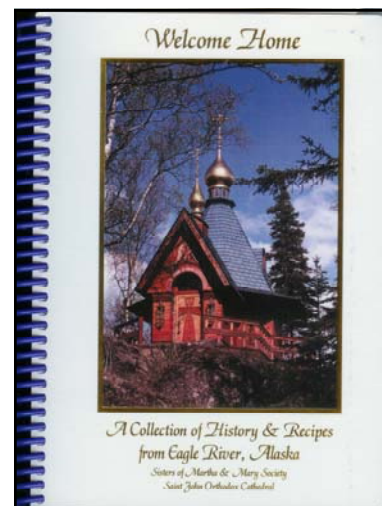
By **Maye Johnson**

In each issue of "In Community" I have touched on one cook and how that person has brought their own unique gifts into our lives. This time I am featuring the cookbook itself. **WELCOME HOME, A Collection of History & Recipes** is a reflection of our community. The community of Saint John is made up of diverse backgrounds, experiences, nationalities and histories and this comes through clearly in the variety of recipes. In February 2002, after a two year labor, *Welcome Home* was published and in 2005 a second edition was printed. It contains over 500 recipes and each divider page contains a picture, history and facts about our community and Alaska. Over and over again I hear how much people love and use the recipes. It is a beautiful book and makes a great gift for yourself or others. The following recipe has been a favorite for the many of us who lived at the Saint James House.

## Good Goulash

**1 lb ground beef**  
**5 green onions, chopped**  
**1-8oz can tomato sauce**  
**1 pkg egg noodles**  
**1-8 oz pkg cream cheese**  
**½ -1 c. Cheddar cheese, grated**  
**8 oz sour cream**  
**salt & pepper to taste**

Brown beef in skillet. Season with salt and pepper. Add tomato sauce to meat and simmer 10 minutes. In bowl mix together cream cheese, sour cream and onions. Cook noodles according to package directions. Drain noodles and place in bottom of 9x9 in. baking dish. Spread cream cheese mixture on top of noodles. Spread hamburger mixture over cream cheese. Sprinkle grated cheese on top and bake for 35 min, uncovered at 350 degrees.



The church cookbook, **Welcome Home**, is available for \$18.00. Contact Maye Johnson to order. [tommajej@mtaonline.net](mailto:tommajej@mtaonline.net)  
Phone or fax: 907-696-3326

## Outpost of the Kingdom

By **Mary Alice Cook**

As I write these words, a chilly spring is slowly giving way to summer in Alaska. Through my window I see three small trees, planted just before the snow of autumn. They survived the bitter cold and escaped the hungry moose and now they are ready to burst with green leaves. The Paschal season of the Church coincides with springtime in the far north, making the earth itself an icon of new life and promise.

We who work to produce this little newsletter also feel a sense of renewal of purpose. In our previous issue, we asked our readers for comment on our effort, and the response we received was gratifying, encouraging and very much appreciated. A common thread throughout was the appreciation for stories about our life together here in the St. John's community. Several writers expressed thanks for the many color pictures, and added a desire to visit our parish and our beautiful state. We are grateful to the sender of a generous donation, both for the gift and for the kind words included with it. We received a request for more stories about our experiences with different aspects of Orthodoxy and a suggestion that we work to "present Orthodox teaching in a more personal way." We are grateful for this suggestion and for all the comments we received.

We mark the end of Pascha with Christ's Ascension, and we remember His promise that "I go to prepare a place for you." All humans long for a *place* to live, to belong, and to grow. For the parishioners at Saint John's, our place for now is here. We look forward to sharing with you more of our stories as Orthodox Christians *In Community*.

## In Community

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# Retreat ... Then Advance

By John Morrison

After the joyful celebrations of Pascha (the exuberant indulgence in once restricted foods and the much less exuberant consequences of overindulgence), the memory of the Great Fast fades quickly. Before it fades completely let me share my memories of the St. John's men's Lenten Retreat.

This year's retreat was again held at the Beach Lake main cabin (April 8-9), only ten minutes from St. John's by car, but seemingly much farther in spirit. This was well suited to the purpose of our weekend, to reflect upon the challenge of being in the world but not of the world.

Now the whole idea of a "retreat" has fallen into disfavor in recent years. Why, it sounds almost un-American! "Retreat? WE don't do that! We *advance!*" And so my employer, no doubt like thousands of others around the country that march to the beat of the same management consulting gurus, holds company "Advances," where participants resolutely advance upon their problems and wrestle them into submission.

But throughout the Old and New Testament histories, and in the Church from apostolic times to the present, we see a different model, every advance towards the Kingdom is preceded by retreat from the world. This year, as a model of this pattern, we considered the life of a saint especially honored by the Church on the last Sunday of Lent, Saint Mary of Egypt.

We began Friday night with evening prayers, followed by Fr. Marc's overview of the purpose and goals of the retreat. He then read the *Life of St. Mary* written by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who had interviewed the priest-monk who met her. We sang Compline and the Akathist to the Mother of God. Most of the men then headed home for the night while a few stayed over at the camp.

After morning prayers on Saturday, Fr. Marc read an excerpt from a second-century Christian apologist who described how Christians are in the world "as the soul is in the body." The rest of the morning was spent quietly reading, writing, or reflecting upon a list of questions that probed different aspects of the challenges we each face living in a world whose values are often in conflict with those we profess as disciples of the crucified and risen Christ.

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# Seeking God's Will

By Bethany Peters

Our women's retreat was held again this year at Mountain Streams Bed and Breakfast in Palmer, Alaska. When I picture a B&B, it is always a quaint, cozy little cottage that caters to middle-aged or older couples wanting to spend a romantic weekend alone. With that image in mind, you may wonder how forty women could be comfortable discussing their spiritual life in such a place. Well, this B&B was not what my mind had conjured up. The entrance looks like it could lead to a ranch in Wyoming, with its tall sign over the drive and fence made of old logs. The long driveway opens up to reveal a beautifully landscaped yard and a magnificent, three-story log home. The building seems perfect, right down to the comfortable sitting room that is large enough to hold forty women discussing, among other things of course, their spiritual lives.

The main topic we discussed this year was "Knowing and Accepting God's Will." Just like my mind had imagined the B&B to be something very different than it turned out to be, we often have images of God's will being something different than what it may end up being. Some people may have a grand revelation of God's will that hits them all of a sudden, like seeing a gorgeous home nestled deep in the woods that you never expected to be there. But the most powerful thing I learned this year is that for most of us there is no big event in our lives when His will is made clear. For some of us God's will may be in all the little things we do every day. Mary Alice shared with us a quote that she found in Fr. Thomas Merton's book, *New Seeds of Contemplation*; "The requirements of a work to be done can be understood as the will of God." I think this quote struck home for many of the women at the retreat. Many of us do the hardest job there is. We raise children and care for our families, even sometimes extended families, a never ending, 24-hour a day job. For many of us, simply living our everyday lives means accepting the will of God.

Several women asked how we know if we are following in the path that God meant for us? We talked about the "perfect will" of God and the "permissive will" of God. He gave us free will to make decisions which change our lives. He allows us to make choices which may lead to suffering or death. He allowed Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery, then used this sinful decision and turned it into good. Joseph said to his brothers, "So it was not you who sent me here, but God." That explains God's permissive will.

So how do we know if we are following God's perfect will? Prayer is probably the best answer, but as we realize the wrong decisions we make, we must remember that, "all things work together for good to them that love God." May we all love God, and in that love may His will be done.



# Merton, the Sisters and a Call to Community

By Mary Alice Cook



**Father Thomas Merton in Alaska, 1968. Photo courtesy of Catholic Archdiocese of Anchorage**

*"It is a nice house among the birches, at the foot of low mountains, looking out through the trees toward Cook Inlet & Mount McKinley...they [the nuns] are a good community, and like all, they have their troubles." -Thomas Merton in Alaska.*

Almost forty years ago, the big house near the end of Monastery Drive was home to six Catholic nuns whose convent gave the road its name. They were contemplatives – their primary occupation was prayer – but they also hosted retreats and received guests from all over the world, the most famous of whom was the celebrated Trappist monk, Fr. Thomas Merton. It was in the pages of Fr. Merton's

journal that I first met these sisters, who loved their home they called the "Northern Star," and who expected to dedicate their lives to serving God in Alaska. But troubles, as Fr. Merton said, met them here and, sadly, it did not work out the way they expected. This is a part of what I learned of their story.

Clothed in their distinctive red and white habit, the nuns were members of the order of Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood, who moved to Anchorage in 1967 from their monastery in Portland, Oregon. The group included five young women – Sr. Rosemary, Sr. Mary, Sr. Jeannette, Sr. Evelyn, and Sr. Magdalen. A sixth, Sr. Rita Mary Lang, a nun for 25 years already, was the "mother" of the house. In spite of the fact that their vocation was not active but contemplative, they were asked to host retreats and provide guest accommodations at their Eagle River convent while the archdiocese built a permanent retreat center in Anchorage.

Neighbors who visited them recall that the convent was a welcoming and comfortable place. Friends gave the sisters fresh fish and vegetables and laughed with them as they cooked together in the big, warm kitchen. A neighbor, whose teenaged son guided Fr. Merton on his hikes around the convent, recalls giving one of the sisters her very first home permanent. Many recall that the lack of water on the property was a nagging problem, and that the Catholic church spent a great deal of money drilling wells which never produced. Water was trucked in and rationed.

Prayers and masses were held in a little chapel that is now a bedroom in the east end apartment. When an overflow crowd was present, the altar was moved out to the living room. The priest who served the nuns as chaplain, Fr. Joseph Grady, lived in a small trailer parked nearby. In a newsletter from the "Northern Star," Sr. Jeannette describes a windy, warm February day when Mother Rita set out down the hill to deliver Fr. Grady's dinner tray. She slipped on the icy path and the nuns' dog, Heidi, en-

joyed an unexpected treat.

The group of sisters included a musician, a painter, and a vestment maker. They were hard working hostesses to large and small groups of retreat visitors, and to friends and strangers passing through Anchorage who needed a place to stay. They observed their cycle of worship, assisted the Anchorage clergy and even received a new postulant into their order while in Eagle River. But in their busy lives filled with interesting people, the visit of Fr. Thomas Merton was, in their words, a "tremendous experience."

Fr. Merton came to Alaska for two weeks in September, 1968, the guest of the Anchorage bishop who hoped that the well known monk would establish a hermitage for himself somewhere in Alaska. The bishop asked Fr. Merton to give a workshop to the Precious Blood sisters, so Fr. Merton spent his first four days in Alaska at the Eagle River monastery, staying in Fr. Grady's trailer. While in Alaska, he kept a journal and wrote letters about his experiences; these, along with the teaching he presented, are preserved in a little book, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, which has remained for years in the guest room of what is now the St. James House. His words to the sisters about building community and his many references to Eastern Orthodoxy seem prophetic in light of the very different type of community that would, just a few years later, be born in the same location.

Merton said, "...people come here to find a group of people

*Fr. Merton told the nuns of his interest in the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church and, in a letter to his Abbott, said, "...there is an old Russian Orthodox monk who has lived for years as a hermit off Kodiak Island ..."*

*who love one another...If they are going to find grace and help, it isn't so much from each one of you as an individual, but from the grace that is present in a community of love." St. John's parish, like the sisters he spoke to, is frequently visited by those who have heard of our journey to Orthodoxy, and the hospitality they find here makes our community, also, a comfortable place. But, as Fr. Merton pointed out, the real strength of a community is not the comfort of its members but their unity which creates an environment where God's grace can work.*

Fr. Merton told the nuns of his interest in the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church and, in a letter to his abbott, said, "...there is an old Russian Orthodox monk [Fr. Gerasim] who has lived for years as a hermit off Kodiak Island and in fact before him there was a Staretz there[St. Herman] who is venerated as a saint...I was not able to get to Kodiak and this old monk is now sick...but I hope to meet him someday before he dies." Reading these words forty years later, I felt sadness and regret that Fr. Merton apparently did not make contact with any Orthodox person or church during his weeks in Alaska. But I also sensed that, somehow, a connection *has* been made. Without being aware of it, Fr. Merton and the nuns laid here some of the stepping stones of a path to community and to Orthodoxy, and we who are in this place today can see the faint outline of that path in the

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Merton, the Sisters and a Call to Community



**Sisters of the Northern Star - late 1960's. Photo courtesy of Catholic Archdiocese of Anchorage**

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words they left us.

In one of their newsletters, the nuns wrote: "We have come to love this house and this locality, but are ready to move if we must." The lack of water forced them to move in 1970 to the new retreat center in Anchorage, which they were asked to

manage. They and their bishop soon realized that this work was not compatible with their contemplative calling and the group returned to their mother house in 1972.

In December, 1968, two months after leaving Alaska, Fr. Thomas Merton died in Thailand. And in February, 2006, Sr. Rita Mary, a faithful nun for 63 years, passed away in a Brooklyn convent on the very day that I finally

located her. Though we are separated by time, death, and religious differences, their memory nevertheless remains poignant, as do the words of Fr. Merton, jotted quickly in his notebook just before he landed in Anchorage: "*I am here in answer to someone's prayer.*"

## Retreat ... Then Advance

(Continued from page 3)

Lunch was followed by an open discussion time. For me it was an honor and a blessing to hear brothers in Christ share honestly about their struggles to follow the high calling of "Christian" in an often hostile spiritual environment. I can't recall that there were any breakthrough solutions to the problem. There probably isn't one this side of Heaven! None of us are in a position to follow St. Mary's radical model of extreme separation from the world. But if one did faithfully carry his personal "Cross", that is, crucify his own ego, seek not his own will but God's, and "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with his God," would that be any less miraculous than floating, as St. Mary did, above the ground in prayer?

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The Big House lawn was the setting for the Stogsdill's Wedding in 1977. Saint John Cathedral was later built in the parking area in background.



The girls in the Saint James House – 2004



Big House Crew - 1975



Summer 1978

road ended in a gravel driveway that encircled the house and the front yard was a field of wild grass. The white living room carpet was stained beyond repair and bags of garbage had been tossed into the fireplace.

But an even larger problem was where to quickly get the required \$5,000 down payment. By God's providence an evangelist named Jack Archer, a wealthy oil man from Corpus Christi, Texas, was in Anchorage to speak at a local Church. He met Fr. Harold and, with no further in-



Construction in September of 1972

vestigation, agreed to put up the needed money. In October 1972 the Dunaways moved in with the vision to create a house of Christian discipleship. Twelve young people moved in with them and began to fix up the house, make meals together, study together and seek together a solution to the stubborn water problem.

A trailer next door to the house became the home of Don and Talitha Lourie, and their young daughter, Shannon, soon called the place next door simply the "Big House." The name stuck for

many years. By the following summer a deal was struck with Mr. Tilford, a neighbor a thousand feet away on Darby Road, who had a well with unlimited water, to run a plastic pipe from his house twice a month to fill up the railroad car buried in the front yard. This became the solution to the water problem for many years and also an important source of shared struggle for the residents of the house. Great effort was required to see that the pipe did not freeze in cold weather and, if it did, an even bigger job followed of dragging the pipe indoors and thawing it out. Another common struggle involved being on the state's "road kill" list to obtain free meat. Several times a year, almost always in the middle of the night at temperatures below zero, the call came from the Troopers that it was our turn to go pick up a dead moose alongside some nearby road. We would gut it, then hang it, and a few days later cut it up into roasts and steaks. The passing summers gave themselves to many long days of raking rocks and chants of "if it doesn't grow, pick it up." Slowly the property began to be transformed.

In the ensuing years the house saw many marriages, which in turn gave birth to a growing community, which soon gave birth to a Church, which eventually gave birth to St. John Cathedral. The living room that once rang with guitar-led choruses of "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord" from young people sprawled in bean bags, gave way to a temple of standing worshippers crossing themselves with solemn joy, singing, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immor-

tal, have mercy on us."

This "Big House" has now been supplanted by the Cathedral as the spiritual center of our community. The new name, "Saint James House," is in memory of the Apostle James, the older brother of John the Evangelist. Yet it has essentially continued to be what it was more than thirty years ago, a home in which young singles can spend a year of their life together with a mature Christian family. As testimony to that purpose, many group pictures hang in the stairway and the dining room, revealing the bright young faces of those who have lived there, captured at a critical time in their life, a time when, for a moment, they contemplated more earnestly seeking the face of God.



Weddings were a common event at St. James House. Barb & Harold Parker - 1976



As a young man in 1979, Father Paul Jaroslaw chopped wood for the fireplace in Saint James House. Father Paul is now the pastor of All Saints of America Orthodox Church in Homer, Alaska

# Everyone's Home

By April Dilts

I'm not sure what prompted me to go to the little monastery on the east side of Denver that November night in 2003. I had been to St. George's a few times before, visiting the solitary monk and wondering at the beauty of this strange and ancient faith. Orthodoxy had intrigued me since I first entered a church two years before during my sophomore year at Colorado Christian University. I was invited by a friend who was himself redis-

*"I knew that committing myself to follow Christ in the context of Orthodoxy would mean that my life would take a new path."*

covering the Church after many years away from it. I loved the peace that surrounded me when I entered an Orthodox church. I loved how everything around me drew me into prayer. I loved the unity in which everyone cried out the humble prayer, "Lord have mercy." Yet still I hesitated, unsure if what I saw here was truly the church that Christ came to build and even more unsure if I could find my place within it. I knew that committing myself to follow Christ in the context of Orthodoxy would mean that my life would take a new path. My friends would look at me strangely. My family, who raised me with great faith in the Protestant

church, would struggle with my decision. The Western, Protestant mindset with which I had learned to view God, the church, and everything in life would be challenged. This was not an easy decision. Yet God would not stop tugging on my heart, pulling me slowly, but firmly in the direction of His Church.

That night at the monastery was another one of those tugs. I had grown up believing that religious rituals were superfluous and that the people who practiced them were spiritually dead. I felt drawn to Orthodoxy, but still it seemed foreign, something practiced by people I couldn't identify with and who didn't think much about what it really meant. What I found that night was something very different: a group of everyday people talking, laughing and striving to follow Christ. I met one guy in particular, a recent convert to Orthodoxy, passing through on his way home from Alaska. He let me ask hard questions, and with patience and humility helped me work through the answers.

Two years later, after I had finally given in to God and to Orthodoxy, it was that same friend from the monastery, Josh Lourie, who told me of a community called St. John's and a place called the St. James House that might be a good fit for me. So I packed up my little room in my



April Dilts

hometown of Billings, Montana and moved to Alaska to find a community, and to learn to be at home in Orthodoxy.

I have found that life in the St. James House is a kind of journey of its own. It is a place full of opportunities to break down walls and build relationships. It's an invitation to live life looking inward, to be more aware of who I am and how I can grow spiritually. It is also an unavoidable reminder to look outward, living in relationship to the people around me, many of whom are very different from myself. Some days I wonder why I ever came here, other days I think I will never leave. Probably the truth is somewhere in between. God has put me here for a season, for His purpose of molding me into His likeness. I look forward to where that purpose will take me on the road ahead.



Saint James House Residents – 2006

## SAINT JAMES HOUSE

As a ministry of Saint John Orthodox Cathedral in Eagle River, Alaska, the Saint James House provides a one-year residential program where young, single people live in an extended family setting and aim to become better prepared to live in the world as faithful Orthodox Christian men and women. This is accomplished primarily through evening studies, household work projects and participation in the liturgical and community life of Saint John Cathedral, as well as their daily interaction with one another.

***You are invited to apply for the 2006-2007 program which runs from August through the following June. Visit our website at: [stjohnalaska.org](http://stjohnalaska.org) or call (907) 696-2002***

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## ***SAINT JAMES THE GREAT***

***By Mary Ann Northey***

At first it seemed like a simple assignment to write about St. James the Great, brother of our church patron, St. John the Evangelist. But that was not to be the case, as there are three St. James' in the early church (two, according to the Western Church, which often combines the lives of St. James the Less with St. James the Just.) St. James the Just, also called the brother of our Lord, was Bishop of Jerusalem and was the author of the epistle of St. James in the New Testament. Tradition tells us that this St. James was the youngest son of the widowed St. Joseph, husband of the Theotokos, and was still a member of the household when Christ was born. Icons of the "Flight into Egypt" show St. James the Just as a youth and member of that traveling party. St. James the Less was one of the Twelve, the son of Alphaeus, brother of St. Jude and probably of St. Matthew as well, since St. Matthew was also the son of Alphaeus. This St. James is called "Less" because of his small stature, and because he was called to service after St. James the Great.

**Saint James the Great** was the son of Zebedee and (Mary) Salome. He was the brother of Saint John the Evangelist, and both men were called by Christ to leave their nets and follow Him. St. James was privileged, along with St. John and St. Peter, to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter, the Transfiguration of our Lord on Mt. Tabor, and the Lord's agony in Gethsemane. St. James and St. John were eager to spread the word about Christ, and were impatient in their youth and zeal. Some regarded them as temperamental, as evidenced in Luke 9:54 when St. James, learning that the skeptical residents of a Samaritan town refused to welcome Jesus, asks, "... Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" The Lord rebuked him and thereafter would, in good humor, refer to St. James and St. John as the "Sons of Thunder."

St. James was faithful until his martyrdom, the first of the Twelve, in A.D. 44 or 45. He was beheaded by Herod Agrippa, who wanted to send a warning to the new Christians and to impress the Jewish leaders. St. James the Great is the patron saint of Spain and his relics are there. The Orthodox Church celebrates his life and faith on April 30.

