

# Martha and Mary House

An Orthodox Christian Maternity Home

Spring 2003



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"Loving and Serving God in our Neighbor"

## Completing Our First Year

**Glory be to Jesus Christ!** By the Grace of God we completed our first year and are grateful to have given shelter to six expectant mothers who had no other place to go. Three mothers have now given birth. Baby "Anna", a year old in March, and her mother "Anna" are still with us. Baby "Anna's" father now shares joint legal custody and has unsupervised visits four times a week, 'with safeguards' as recommended by Minor's Counsel. 'Safeguards' in this case means that the father, who has been found to be a 'substantial risk' to his daughter by Child Protective Services, must continue in counseling. The situation is far from satisfactory. We ask continued prayers. Meanwhile "Anna" is taking more responsibility for the housekeeping and is able to help driving to appointments and grocery shopping. This frees Housemother for other tasks. "Anna" does not want to be a single Mom raising her daughter alone. Coming from a culture where marriages are arranged and there are no single moms, she hopes to marry a mature, responsible man in a lifelong commitment to marriage and family. We are praying for God's will.

### Second Mother and Baby

"Shawna", our second mother and baby "Tim" born in August, are now back in their home county where the husband and father is able to care for his son. Martha and Mary House provided a safe place for baby "Tim" for three months when his mother's mental health became a serious concern. We were able to work with Child Protective Services, Public Health nurse and counselor. The experience was part of our first year learning curve.

### Our First Adoption

Our third mother, "Bonnie", came to us

in mid September. Her baby was due in March, but arrived in February, two weeks early. Baby "Micah" weighed a little over five pounds, tiny but healthy. Conception was a result of incest and "Bonnie" has struggled with emotional turmoil and pain for much of her young life. At Martha and Mary House she has been in counseling with Father George Morelli, Phd., clinical psychologist and



The mothers and mother-to-be enjoy family mealtime together

Orthodox priest who comes here weekly for morning prayer. "Bonnie" chose to place her child for adoption in an Orthodox Christian family. Through **Zoe for Life** in Ohio she found, as she said, 'the perfect family.' The decision to place for adoption was difficult for "Bonnie" who felt much like an abandoned child herself. For several months she struggled - yearning to parent her child. Anger and anguish, prayer and pain poured into poetry, and in the end a letting go. After choosing her child's adoptive family "Bonnie" wrote:

### Giving Him To You

*Silence  
knowing what I have to do  
even if I don't want to*

*The feeling of impending doom for  
myself if I do it  
like I failed you*

*but I haven't really*

*I'm only just now  
not failing you  
I'm only now doing what's best for  
the both of us*

*So hold your baby tight  
for me when he cries  
and let him know I have  
not abandoned him  
when he asks about me  
just tell him that I love him  
with all of my heart  
and when it came down to it  
this was the only true way to  
show him*

*And if he wants to find me  
I am here*

*I will not abandon him  
in life or death  
I will not ever abandon him  
I will only show him that  
I always will and have loved him  
the best way that I could  
and that was giving him to you  
More on "Bonnie" on page 2*

## Financial Support Growing

Financially, this fall, donations increased, but contributions from our residents remain low.

In what may seem an obstacle, we do not qualify as a food stamp facility because we eat 'family style'. Regulations require that recipients must purchase their own food, store, prepare and eat separately. We are a family. If our Martha and Mary House "Daughters" cannot get food-stamps, we trust God will provide. Better to depend on Our Lord than on the state!

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## Martha and Mary House: Completing the First Year

Martha and Mary House is an Orthodox Christian Maternity Home dedicated to providing pregnant women in crisis a place to live before and after the birth of their babies.

*We recognize the sanctity of life and that each expectant mother who comes to us and her unborn child is a unique and precious individual, created in the image of God and loved by Him.*

*By the grace of God Martha and Mary House was established in November 2001 as an institution in the Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of the West. Members of several Canonical Orthodox churches serve on our Board of Directors, headed by His Grace Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco and the West.*

*Our goal is to provide spiritual, emotional and practical support during this crucial time of a mother's life as she faces the difficult choice of parenting or placing her child in a loving, adoptive Christian family.*

*We pray that each Mom will discover her God-given personal resources and how to develop them; that she may come to know herself as a child of God and seek His will for herself and the child God has entrusted to her.*

### The Lazarus Team

At the recent Board of Directors meeting Carmine Latrecchia reported on the Lazarus Team's ongoing practical support at the House. From fixing a leaking toilet to bringing wood or mowing the lawn. The Lazarus Team will be involved in several needed projects. Carmine and John Klavzar have measured for a fence around the front yard. They will look at getting bids. House Mother has secured one bid for much needed dual pane win-

dows. Carmine will seek one more bid. He mentioned the need to check the fireplace



dampener which is stuck, letting cold air into the house. Steve Testrake is co-

ordinator for protestant Lazarus Team support. He is working on getting a bid for completion of the room and bathroom behind the garage.

### Our Circle of Friends is Growing

Our exhibit at the Antiochian Western Region Parish Life Conference in July continues to bear fruit. Special thanks to Barbara Linnehan who made the display board and Inga Eanes who co-ordinated our three day representation at the Conference. As a result, Saint Luke Orthodox Church in Garden Grove was the first parish to pledge a monthly contribution for a year to Martha and Mary House. In November Housemother and Carmine Latrecchia of our Lazarus Team of volunteers, were invited to

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### "Bonnie"-Continued

As soon as "Bonnie" went into labor, the adoptive parents were notified and caught the first plane to California. They arrived at the hospital less than 12 hours after their infant son was born. "Bonnie" had prepared a scrapbook for them with pictures and her poem. When she and baby "Micah" were released from the hospital, she placed him in the arms of his adoptive father. With his new parents and grandmother, "Micah" would stay with a family in our parish till the interstate adoption papers could be completed - a matter of days. "Bonnie" came home to Martha and Mary House, and that evening broke down in tears asking for her baby back. She had the legal right to do so. Reluctantly she agreed to wait till the next day - Sunday - to talk over her options with Father George Morelli. The adoptive parents were notified - and requests for prayer went out to parishes, monasteries and prayer partners across the country. "Bonnie's"

anguish was exacerbated by post partum hormonal changes and her breasts filling with colostrum and milk for the baby. She was also grappling with another loss; only days before "Micah's" birth she had consented to the adoption of her two year old son "Ezra" by his foster parents.

"Ezra" had been removed by Child Protective Services when he was eight months old and had passed from foster parents to foster parents before being placed in a family who wanted to adopt him. He had special needs, but on weekly visitations "Bonnie" had observed how he was thriving and bonding with his foster mother. "He loves her and she loves and really cares for him," Bonnie said. Her poem for "Micah's" adoptive parents, "Giving him to you", was as true for "Ezra's" foster/adoptive parents.

Three day old "Micah" experienced his first liturgy at St.

John of Damascus Orthodox Church in Poway with his adoptive parents while, at Martha and Mary House, "Bonnie" was preparing for her baby - pumping colostrum and freezing it. "Micah" needs it whether he stays with them or with me," she said. Sunday afternoon she and Father George talked. The decision was "Bonnie's"-choosing what was best for her child. Monday Father George would be back for morning prayer and Bonnie would call "Ezra's" Child Protective Services adoption worker who had approved the decision to place her newborn with an adoptive family of her own choice. There was a possibility that C P S would step in if "Bonnie" chose to parent. In that case she would have no choice of adoptive family. That would be the worst case scenario for "Micah". The adoption worker could not see her till Wednesday, after her final visitation with "Ezra".

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# More News and Notes

## Circle of Friends Continued

Matins and Liturgy. Housemother spoke to the congregation and Martha and Mary House received the donations for the coffee-hour; 600.00 dollars! We were also given a VCR and can now view educational and other videos.

As the only maternity home in Orthodox America (to our knowledge), and one of two homes in San Diego County - the other is for teens who have been wards of the court - our presence is greeted with much interest both within and outside the Orthodox community. .

In December Father Demetri Tsigas from Saint Gregory of Nyssa Greek Orthodox Church in El Cajon, came with women from his church, bringing lunch and household supplies as well as a check. Kathy Sotier and Wendy Braun, representing the Women of Saint Barnabas Antiochian Orthodox Church in Costa Mesa,

came to establish a relationship with Martha and Mary House. In January Housemother with "Anna" and "Baby Anna" attended Sunday Liturgy at Saint Barnabas and Housemother spoke to the women and teenage girls of the parish. A couple of women from Saint Barnabas drive down once a month, bringing lunch and supplies, and helping out where needed. In February Housemother spoke to a women's group at Saint Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church.

## At the Diocesan Assembly

As an institution in the Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of the West, we gave our first report to the Assembly meeting in Denver in October. Our Board Chairman Bill Moision was a delegate from Saint John of Damascus parish in Poway, and Carmine Latrecchia and House-mother Sarah

Oftedal were observers. We found much interest among delegates. Gradually our mailing list is growing. The girls addressed more than two hundred Christmas letters to parishes and Friends of Martha and Mary House across the U.S. Prayer partners include the Monasteries in the Diocese of the West (as well as Holy Myrrhbearers in New York).

## Our first Thanksgiving and Christmas

Our first Thanksgiving and Nativity season many friends brought gifts and food. Our Thanksgiving Turkey came from a member of our Abortion Survivors Anonymous group. The Christmas Ham was brought by Steve and Debby Testrake - Steve is a member of an Evangelical Free Church, and a very active member of our Lazarus Team of volunteers. He and a friend brought a truck load of wood before Christmas

Vera and Kim Klavzar took us on an outing to Bates Nut Farm in Valley Center. Carmine Latrecchia helped bring home our Christmas tree and light it up. The girls baked and decorated the traditional seven kinds of cookies to share with neighbors and guests.



Enjoying the baby's first Christmas tree.

# Our Photo Gallery



Left: Mother and child at St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church in Poway, CA.

Right: Caring for the infants is a critical part of life at the Martha and Mary House.



Right: the family room houses the corner where daily prayers are held.



Left: Mother and child enjoying a lighter moment at the house.

# More News and Notes

## Financial Support Continued

Our prayer is to develop enough financial support to offer help to those who cannot contribute. Gradually more parishes and individuals are committing to monthly support. A Friend of Martha and Mary House who works for Cubic Corporation, suggested we ask for a contribution. They give regularly to local charities and responded with a check for \$1000.00, saying they were proud to support such a worthy cause as ours. We are now emboldened to ask other corporations or businesses if they contribute to local charities and have been encouraged to make request to several.

Barbara Linnehan helped draft a grant proposal, and Deacon John Robinson at Saint John of Damascus is assisting us. He has extensive experience in grant writing from twenty years as Lutheran Pastor of an inner city parish with outreach to the homeless. A general contractor friend has provided cost estimates for our high priority projects, such as dual pane windows, fence around the front yard and completion of room addition and third bath.

### Special Needs:

We have need of a desk top computer, a single bed, wheel barrow, shovel and garden hoses.

## Abortion Survivors Anonymous

Another post abortion grief and reconciliation group was completed in February with a memorial service conducted by Father George Morelli. A Los Angeles group started in March. A Twelve Step Workbook is available. The next group at Martha and Mary House is forming. We continue to receive calls for help from across the country. Please join us in prayer for all expectant mothers and their unborn children and families. And for all who have lost unborn children by miscarriage or abortion, and their families. May the memory of their children be eternal!



Housemother with baby Anna in the kitchen.

## Forming Our New Advisory Board

At the conclusion of our first year, we have much to be grateful for. Our learning curve continues to be steep. The task before us is greater than we are capable of doing in our own strength, but what is impossible for us is possible for God. He is bringing together many who are offering their expertise as members of Martha and Mary House Advisory Board:

Dr. Nicholas Jauregui, M.D. Medical Director of Alternative Pregnancy Care Clinic in Escondido. He delivers "our" babies and provides pre- and post-natal care for babies and mothers.

Adoption Attorney G. Darlene Anderson. Emmanuel Faith Community Church, Escondido.

Fr. George Morelli, Ph.D. Ass't Pastor, St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, San Diego, Director, Holy Cross Center for Cognitive Therapy.

Deacon John Robinson, St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church,(OCA) Poway.

Deacon Rick (Theodore) Billings, St. Barnabas Antiochian Orthodox Church, Costa Mesa. Media and Marketing consultant.

Steve Testrake, Lazarus Team.

Nicholas M. Gines, C.P.A., Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church.

### Want to donate time?

If you would like to organize a group from your parish to help with projects around the Martha and Mary House, call: 760-741-7050.

## Notes from the Housemother

This year the resident Housemother has been the only 'staff', on duty 24 hours 7 days a week. Our vision is still for two Orthodox women to share the responsibility of living at the house. In God's time we trust He will bring what He knows we need. We are grateful for strength to do what has been put before us. Volunteers are wonderful.

The Lazarus team of men who respond to emergencies - fixing a running toilet or leaking roof, bringing and splitting wood for the fire-place, taking care of our grounds and cars, supervising visits - we are grateful! The 'Martha' team who help wash windows, clean house, provide food and supplies and respond in emergencies to stand in for the Housemother. And the 'Mary' team praying with us.

When we started a year ago we knew little of what to expect. Times have changed since Housemother gave birth to her first child in a Maternity Home in the late 50's, intending to place for adoption. Back then 5% of children in the U. S. were born out of wedlock. Today 33% of babies are born to single mothers! Back then adoption was the option for women who were pregnant and unmarried. In 1970, before Roe vs. Wade made abortion easily available, 400,000 babies were born out of wedlock, 71,000 of them were adopted.

In 1999 single moms gave birth to 1.3 million babies (an additional 1.3 million are aborted annually), but only 23,537 were adopted. Yet, statistics show that children adopted as babies actually do better than average children. Only 7 percent of adolescents adopted in the first year of life repeated a grade in school, compared to 12 percent of those living with both birth parents, and 30 percent of children with a single parent, according to a study reported in Washington Times. Children living with a single parent are 3 times as likely to be suspended from school (17 percent)

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# Martha and Mary House Newsletter

## **“Bonnie”-Continued**

“Bonnie” would make her decision then. That meant three more days of anguished waiting and prayer for “Micah’s” adoptive parents. In the meantime he was thriving on a mixed diet of mother’s milk and formula. “Bonnie” was busy collecting infant clothing, blankets, bottles and pacifier. “If he goes home with his adoptive family, I am sure they can use the things I got for him. They probably didn’t have time to get everything he needs”. Apparently “Bonnie” was thinking first of “Micah’s” needs, not her own. We prayed she would make the right decision.

Wednesday morning she announced: “I think you should call the adoptive parents and tell them they need four tickets to go home!” “A fourth ticket for “Micah”? Bonnie smiled. “He’s the fourth, isn’t he?” She had not yet spoken with the CPS adoption worker. “I don’t need to,” she said. “This is my decision. I chose “Mica’s” parents for him. He needs a Mommy and a Daddy and grandparents and cousins and growing up in Church. I will always be his birth mother who loves him and he will know that. This way both my sons are in open adoptions. I know where they are. They know about me. I get to see pictures and send them things. I know this is best for them.”

The adoptive parents wept in relief and gratitude. So did we. “Bonnie” made a true sacrifice of love for her two sons. After final papers were signed, the CPS case worker called on behalf of Ezra’s adoptive parents; could they bring him to meet his baby brother and adoptive parents, perhaps take a ‘family picture’ for both brothers’ scrapbooks? “Bonnie” was willing, and so were “Mica’s” adoptive parents. That evening they met at Martha and Mary House - an awesome and joyful conclusion to the drama of the last five days. “Those days were my “labor pains”, said “Mica’s” adoptive mother. The extended family posed for pictures: “Bonnie” in the center, flanked by her two sons on the lap of their adoptive mothers, the two fathers behind. Lots of pictures of baby “Mica”

with his big brother. The two sets of parents exchanged contact information. The brothers will grow up knowing each other. Thanks be to God for His mercies!

## **A future for “Bonnie”.**

Before coming to Martha and Mary House “Bonnie’s” life had been marked by emotional and physical abuse and turmoil. She had found refuge in shelters, with friends and strangers and dropped out of school after the eleventh grade. “Bonnie” is bright, a great reader and gifted writer. At Martha and Mary House she has spent much time at the computer, writing her story in prose and poetry, and prepared for her GED test. We pray for each expectant Mom that she may discover her God given personal resources and how to develop them. Friends of Martha and Mary House have asked, “what will happen to “Bonnie?”” and joined us in prayer for her future. We felt she needed to get away - to a somewhat structured environment where she could continue to heal from the wounds of her past and go to college. Mother Cassiana of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Monastery in Colorado, recommended an Antiochian Orthodox parish in another state, in a city with a private college ‘just right’ for “Bonnie”. A host family offered a safe starting place. The contact has been made and “Bonnie” is thrilled. As soon as she has completed her GED test - in a few weeks, she will be on her way. We pray that needed resources and a scholarship will be provided, and give thanks to God for His mercies.

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## **From the Housemother Continued**

as those with adoptive parents (6 percent). Adopted adolescents have higher self esteem than a national sample of teenagers (55 to 45 percent) and are much less likely to see their parents divorce (11 percent vs. 28), reports the Search Institute. Further, mothers who place their children for adoption are more likely to graduate, be employed and to marry.

Children born to single mothers are

likely to spend much of their early childhood in day care. As an Orthodox Christian Maternity Home we find ourselves in a culture that is not only pro abortion, but increasingly anti-God, anti-marriage and anti-two-parent families.

Our purpose is of course to provide an alternative to abortion, but we do not encourage single motherhood (nor condemn it!) We seek instead to promote the value of marriage and two parent families. We encourage birth fathers to accept responsibility for their children and if possible, together with the mother, make a commitment to marriage and family. Adoption is presented as a loving and sacrificial alternative to single parenting.

In celebrating the Nativity, the birth of God the Son to a Virgin mother, we are reminded that Mary was not a ‘single Mom’. God entrusted Joseph with the responsibility of ‘taking Mary as his wife’, protecting and providing for her and parenting the infant and young child Jesus.

We sense our call to pray for and work to save the ‘least of’ God’s children and to strengthen marriage and families. There are plenty of challenges ahead, but we believe God is at work and will complete what He has begun. It is for us to trust, obey and follow Him..

House Mother Sarah Elisabet

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**Please continue to  
remember us in your prayers  
each day.**

Martha and Mary House  
An Institution of the Diocese of the West  
The Orthodox Church In America  
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**Martha and Mary House**  
**An Orthodox Christian Maternity Home**  
**Working together to save the "least of" God's children**

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***Holy Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth***



**Troparion, Tone 4**

Thy noble rank hidden in humility, O Elizabeth, wise in God, with the two-

fold service of Martha and Mary didst thou honor Christ.

Having purified thyself with mercy, patience and love like a righteous sacrifice thou didst offer thyself to God.

Therefore, honoring thy life of good works and suffering as that of a true guide, we fervently beg of thee: Holy Martyr and Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Pray to Christ our God to save and enlighten our souls.

Kontakion, Tone 2

Who can tell us of thy great labor of faith: In the depths of the earth as in a bright paradise, Thy passion-bearer and Grand Duchess Elizabeth rejoiced with the angels in psalms and hymns. And suffering to be murdered, she called out on behalf of the godless tormentors: Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Through her prayers, O Christ God, have mercy and save our souls.