

**MARTHA AND MARY HOUSE**  
**Loving and Serving God in Our Neighbor**

By the grace of God (and stamped with the Seal of the Secretary of State of California) Martha and Mary House was incorporated as a non-profit Religious Institution in the Orthodox Church of America, the Diocese of the West on November 21, 2001.

Our stated purpose is to be a witness of the historic Orthodox Christian Faith - in obedience to the command of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to worship God and to love and serve Him in our neighbor according to the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. That is, of course, the common purpose of all Orthodox Christians. In the Martha and Mary House, our specific obedience is to be a place where mature Orthodox women - related to a parish and sharing a simple rule of prayer - may provide spiritual, emotional and practical 'mothering' and 'grandmothering' of younger women in crisis post-abortion or pregnant at risk of aborting - regardless of religious and social background. We offer shelter and support during the pregnancy, and after the birth of their babies, as they face the difficult choice of parenting or placing their child in an adoptive Christian family.

We give priority to pregnant abortion survivors in need of shelter and offer a program of reconciliation and grief work for women (and men) who have suffered the loss of children by choice. Reconciling with God and with their aborted children - now among the martyred Saints in Heaven - heals the deep wound in their heart and soul. It enables pregnant Moms to freely love the living child in their womb.

Abortion Survivors Anonymous - founded in San Diego in 1988 - have met in weekly Twelve Step sessions at Saint John of Damascus Orthodox Church in Poway since 1995, and now meets at the Martha and Mary House. From the beginning Bishop Tikhon and our parish priest, Father Alexander Federoff, encouraged the work. The Martha and Mary House as an

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Institution is just in its infancy - but has 'been long in gestation', as one of our prayer partners put it. The vision has been a prayer project in the parish of Saint John of Damascus for several years. Friends in other OCA parishes, other Orthodox jurisdictions, Roman Catholics and Protestants in San Diego and across the country and abroad have prayed with us - and for God's mercy and protection of those at greatest risk in our culture of death; the unborn and the elderly.

In 1997 an inheritance and a couple of generous donations made it possible to set aside money for a down-payment on a house. But the particulars of the house eluded us. Who would live there? How would we go about it? It seemed all we could do was pray, state our willingness to serve and try to wait on the Lord in patience.

Then, in the fall of 2000, Tobey Wilbert, one of our active elderly parishioners - who had no children or relatives to support her - broke a shoulder and was moved to a facility where she was neither happy nor of much use. She bore it patiently, saying: "God must have a purpose, but I pray He will get me out of there some day." One Sunday Father Alexander asked, "Have you thought any more about the Martha and Mary House?" Frankly, we hadn't. "Maybe you should," he added. Over coffee several people, some new to the parish, said: "Count me in." And so we began our search for a suitable house. In California as many as six unrelated adults - (related children are allowed in addition) - may live together in a single family residence without requiring a special use permit. We hoped to find a house near the Church, where one of us would live as house mother, Tobey would be 'grandmother', leaving room for four expectant mothers - one or more of them possibly with a child.

In April 2001 the first organizational meeting was held at St. John's, and in July an interim Board of Directors drafted Articles of Incorporation - to be approved by Bishop Tikhon. On the Board were Father Alexander Federoff, Bill Moision (interim Chairman), Suzanne Yingst, Linda Kedroff and Sarah Elisabet Oftedal from Saint John of Damascus, Inga Eanes from Saint Nicholas, OCA, in San Diego, John Mark Matthews from Saint Anthony the Great Antiochian Orthodox Church in La Jolla, and Linda Sacco from Saint Gregory of Nyssa Greek Orthodox Church in El Cajon. Bishop Tikhon and Father Alexander Federoff, as Diocesan Bishop and local Parish Priest will be ex officio members of the permanent Board.

Tobey needed to move out of her facility in September - and in August we found our

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'perfect house' - an older, four bedroom, two and a half bath home on a third acre in a quiet Escondido neighborhood - 15 minutes from Saint John's. The housemother (Sarah Elisabet Oftedal) moved in September 8. Tobey's furniture arrived on the tenth. She herself was in hospital, having suffered a stroke. Word went out to parishes in San Diego - Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant: Martha and Mary House needed furniture. Three months later we marvel at how beautifully God has furnished the house with items from different donors. A few things wanting are sure to come. God knows what we need and when, and the overflow is filling our garage for a giant sale!

The bedrooms for our pregnant Moms each have a unique character. A family furnished and named one room for Saint Anna, the mother of the Theotokos. Then there is the Saint Mary of Egypt room, and the Saint Elizabeth New Martyr room. Our Abortion Survivor Group meets weekly around a table donated by one of them in the library/prayer room. They call it the Saint Mary room, while the kitchen, of course, is the Saint Martha room.

Why name the house for Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus of Bethany? Theirs was a house of prayer, hospitality and charity where Jesus often was guest. We pray that He will be our guest as we seek to love Him in all who come to Martha and Mary House.

The life And work of New Martyr, Grand Duchess Elizabeth, also inspire us. She founded the Martha and Mary Convent in Moscow in 1909 to minister to the sick, the suffering and the poor. In her Rule for the convent, Abbess Elizabeth wrote: "We realize that it is necessary to base all doing of spiritual works on gratitude to the Lord, in so far as He permits us to serve Him through our neighbor...We should not count how many souls we have saved or how many people we have helped. We must rise above this suffering world to heaven and rejoice with the angels over one soul that is saved, over one cup of cold water given in the name of Christ. Everything must be done prayerfully for God and not for the glory of men... we hear from the Divine Teacher: ' Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'"(Matt. 25:40)

Relics of Saint Elizabeth New Martyr are in the altar at the Church of Saint John of Damascus in Poway. We ask her prayers and those of Saints Martha and Mary for the work of Martha and Mary House. The need is great. We network with Crisis Pregnancy Centers and

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Adoption Agencies, and with ZOE for Life, an Orthodox group based in Ohio, who brings together prospective adoptive families with birth mothers who want to place their children in Orthodox homes. Abortion Survivors are referred to us by therapists and treatment centers nationwide. We counsel by phone and correspondence. Our current ASA group comes from a weekend seminar for post abortion healing and reconciliation in the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego. The Association for Life of San Diego, a largely Protestant group, has invited us to join them as the first Orthodox 'presence'. We pray to be a witness of the historic Orthodox Faith among fellow Christians who know little about the unchanged Traditions of the Holy Orthodox Church.

The work of Martha and Mary House will be shaped by the needs of those who come to us. Please join us in praying for them, and for us. We would love to hear from you. Let us know if we can serve you, and if you want to join us in countering the tragic choices of abortion with loving options of life. Write us, at P.O.Box 1680, Escondido, CA 92033 - or call (760) 741-7050. May God grant us all to serve Him in our neighbor in faith and love.

Pictures: 1. Martha and Mary House - on a quiet street in Escondido, CA

2. Saint Anna's room.
3. Saint Elizabeth New Martyr's room
4. Saint Mary of Egypt's room
5. Living room
6. Living - dining room
7. Library/meeting/Prayer room - 'The Saint Mary Room'
8. Library/meeting/Prayer room - 'The Mary Room'
9. Prayer corner of the library/meeting/Prayer room.