

New Abbess Elected for the Historic Convent of the Mother of God in Knyazhevo (Sofia), Bulgaria

On October 18, 2012 (Old Style), the Feast Day of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke, the Convent of the Protection of the Mother of God in the Knyazhevo district of Sofia, Bulgaria, installed a new Abbess. Since the repose of the late Abbess Seraphima (Princess Olga Liven, in the world) in 2004, the abbacy of the convent of nearly fifty nuns had been vacant.

The Protection Convent was founded by St. Seraphim (Sobolev), the Wonder-Worker of Sofia. When in 1968 the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria adopted the New Calendar, four pious Hieromonks—including two professors of the Theological Academy at the University of Sofia—resisted the innovation and, facing persecution from the Communist government and the Bulgarian Patriarchate, took refuge at the Protection Convent. It was thus that this sisterhood played a pivotal historical role in preserving traditional Orthodoxy in Bulgaria.

The Synod in Resistance consecrated a Hierarchy for the Old Calendarist communities in 1993: His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza, a spiritual son of its former Abbess and also a former professor at the University of Sofia. The Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria and our Holy Synod in Resistance have since then been Sister Churches. Its much-revered First Hierarch and the Protection Convent also have close and abiding personal ties to the American Exarchate of our Church.

The new Abbess of the Knyazhevo sisterhood, Mother Seraphima (Dimitrova), bears the name of its former Abbess, for many years her spiritual Mother. Born in Sofia in 1949, Abbess Seraphima was educated at the French language school in Sofia. She completed her higher education at the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Geodesy, also in Sofia, graduating with a diploma in architecture. After graduation, she was obliged by the communist regime to work as an architectural designer for three years in an architectural firm in the town of Pernik, Bulgaria.

During this period, unable to accept the materialistic world view which then predominated behind the “Iron Curtain,” her quest for the truth of the Orthodox Faith led her to the ever-memorable theologian and professor, Archimandrite Dr. Seraphim (Alexiev), one of the Hieromonks who had taken refuge at the Protection Convent after the change in the Church Calendar. Having become his spiritual daughter, in October of 1975 she entered the convent, in a final fulfillment of her longstanding desire for monasticism (and with his blessing), dedicating herself to the spiritual life.

Mother Seraphima served the convent for many years, helping with its building projects, with Icon painting, and with various photographic projects. At the fall of the communist régime, while still a novice, she spearheaded the convent’s publishing activities, helping to distribute spiritual literature throughout the country of Bulgaria. In the 1990s, she also took part in the organization of the construction of the magnificent Dormition Cathedral in Sofia, which serves as the See of His Eminence, Bishop Photii and the Old Calendar Orthodox communities in Bulgaria.

We wish Abbess Seraphima “За много години,” “Многая лета,” “Many years.”

SEE BELOW A PHOTOGRAPHIC MONTAGE OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE ELEVATION OF MOTHER SERAPHIMA TO THE RANK OF ABBESS

Counter-clockwise from left to right: Bishop Photii bestows the Abbess's staff; a group of the 47 nuns in attendance; the Prayer of blessing for the Abbess; the newly-elevated Abbess bows towards the Altar.

