



Mother Maria (Wall) conducts her obedience at Russian Convent of St. Mary Magdalene and the Community of the Resurrection of Christ in Bethany and serves as the Administrator of the Bethany Orthodox School for Girls. She is a mathematician by education who stands up to Palestinian authorities and fruitfully negotiates on behalf of the school. Though the school is one of the best in the area with a waiting list to get in, they nevertheless struggle financially. The school is a small island of hope in the midst of the wars raging across Palestine, Israel and the Middle East. The girls, many of whom have

relatives in the Gaza Strip, are still studying, and teachers are helping them not only to survive this ongoing conflict but to simply continue to be children.

"It is our responsibility to protect them as much as possible and keep them in safe surroundings and give them the opportunity to talk about what they feel and experience. And an open school is a sign of stability that is absolutely necessary for these children. — Mother Maria

"I was so touched by seeing this school that I could have stayed there the whole day. Someone asked if she was ever afraid for her life, as she has been threatened many times crossing checkpoints. She answered that she is always concerned for her girls, but she thinks of protecting them the way Saint Sophia prepared and prayed for her daughters, Faith, Hope, and Love—and said she would like to prepare her girls for whatever is required of them and not worry for herself. Her goal was to be like St. Sophia, living as if she were already dead. Seeing the beauty of the joy on her face as she said this, I felt like I was in the presence of a saint, and I walked away in tears." - Natalie Kuchta; axiawomen.org



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THE BETHANY ORTHODOX SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



The Bethany Orthodox School for Girls (Written by Dan Koski, 2023)

The Bethany Orthodox School for Girls is under the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission of Jerusalem of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, also known by its English-language acronym ROCOR. It is located below the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives in the biblical town of Bethany, in the neighborhood of Al-Azaria (the place of Lazarus in Arabic), a short distance from the tomb of Lazarus. The property was acquired and developed in the late 19th century up until the First World War as part of the expanding presence and imprint of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Holy Land. Originally serving as a pilgrim's house, it was seized as a garrison for Ottoman soldiers during the First World War and fell into neglect during the tumultuous years of the Jerusalem Mission following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Then in 1937, two Scottish women, former Protestant missionaries, who had converted to Orthodoxy and become tonsured nuns within the Jerusalem Mission, founded a boarding school for Palestinian Christian girls on the property. These extraordinary women, whose names we commemorate amongst the fallen asleep of this world as Mother Mary and Mother Martha, became the nucleus of the Community of the Resurrection of Christ in Bethany, alongside their sister communities at Ascension convent on Mount of Olives and Mary Magdalene convent on Gethsemane.

Still more surprises awaited the small, austere community of the Jerusalem Ecclesiastical Mission. During construction of a new school building on the Bethany compound in the mid-20th century, a stone marker dated to the Byzantine Christian era was discovered that confirmed a chapel dedicated to the place where Christ met Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, and spoke the words recorded in John 11:25: *"I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."*

While the aim of the Sisters was to provide basic education and life skills for Palestinian Christian girls, they also preserved the tradition of pre-revolution Russian Orthodox mission schools in the Holy Land which, at one time present in practically every substantial Christian community, had completely disappeared at the start of the First World War, never to re-open. The School also became a standard in its own time for education of girls and young women, attracting students from across British Mandate Palestine and eventually, Israel-Palestine. Many School alumni went on to become some of the best-regarded educators and health practitioners in Palestine. A few Boarders chose to follow the path of monasticism and became tonsured monastics at either Ascension convent or Mary Magdalene convent, a tradition which has continued until the present day.



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In the 1970s, a decision was made to restructure the School to become a private open enrollment for both Christian and Muslim girls from local families, while still accepting Christian boarders from across the Holy Land.

Today, the community is led by Mother Maria Wall who is fast approaching her fifteenth year in Bethany. The School continues to function as a center of education, faith formation, a place of pilgrimage, community, home and place of refuge amidst life in the ever-challenging and often adversarial, Holy Land.



About Bethany / Al Azaria

When the School was founded in 1937, the city of Bethany/Al-Azaria was nothing more than a sleepy stop on the Holy Land pilgrimage path; close but distinct from Jerusalem, inhabited by Palestinian Christian and Muslim families living alongside a handful of Orthodox and Catholic monastic communities. Today, Bethany is a highly congested, overpopulated isolated suburb of Jerusalem imprisoned behind the Israeli built separation wall and checkpoints. It is polluted, broken and dispossessed through the Israel-Palestine conflict, nearly devoid of indigenous Christians. What began as a social project for Christian girls in need and placed in a dusty hillside village at the edge of the desert, has been providing improvement of the quality of life in the deeply troubled community through education.

Bethany School At a Glance

Founded: 1937

Location: Bethany/Al-Azaria, West Bank partition of East Jerusalem, designated Area C of the Palestinian Authority.

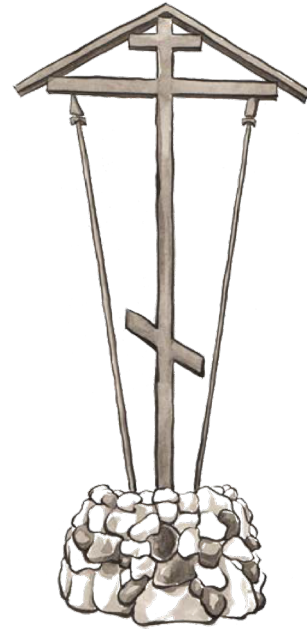
School Classification: Private open enrollment for Palestinian girls, Kindergarten through 12th Grade. Considered a "Scientific Stream" Registered under the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority.

Approximate Number of Students: 450

Approximate Number of Boarders: Approximately 6 to 7

Principal: Mother Maria (Wall)

Website: www.bethany-cimmunity.org



2018 Documentary (Russian with English Subtitles):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtgCG-waLXY>

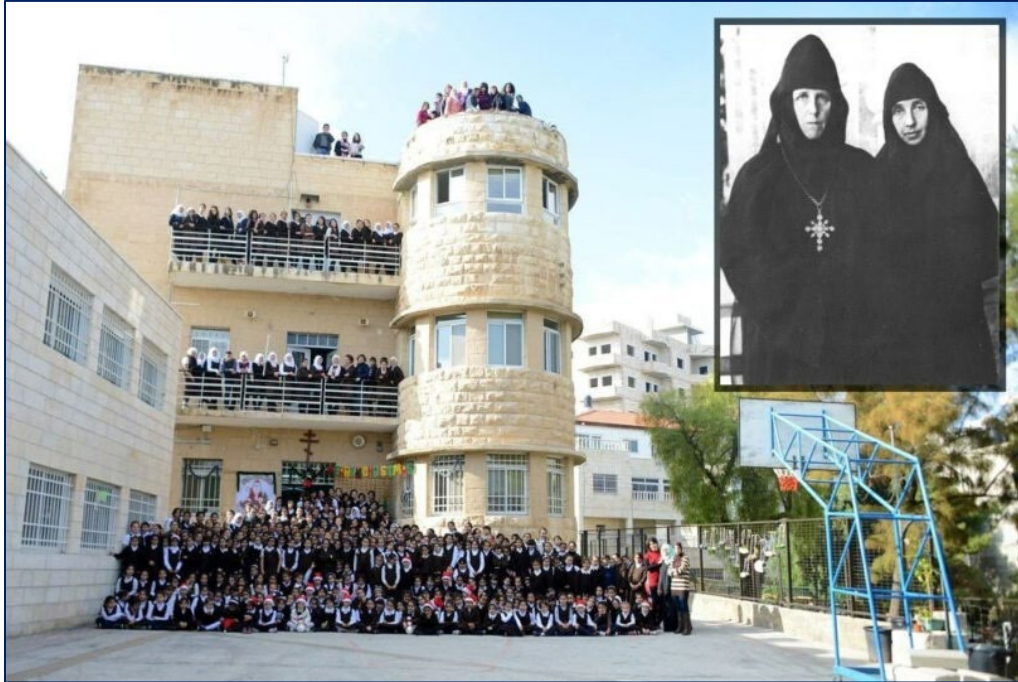
5 Minute Video Saint John Benevolent Fund

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRaluy6J3SE&list=PLI2EvYIQFKCxxXNUGwbbMN6R5zZi0n15FH&index=6>

The Bethany Community of the Resurrection of Christ

From the Website: www.bethany-community.org

At the start of the 20th century, Bethany was still just a small village not far from Jerusalem. In Bethany, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission purchased a modest piece of land close to the Tomb of Lazarus with the intent to accommodate Orthodox pilgrims. In the 1930's, an international sisterhood formed in this place in memory of the hospitality of Martha and Mary. Our compound is now known as the **Bethany Community of the Resurrection of Christ**. *Although it is not onsite, the community is under rule and protection of the Monastery of St. Mary Magdalene located in the Garden of Gethsemane.*



The Orthodox School of Bethany

- On Lazarus Saturday, 1937, a boarding school for Orthodox girls was opened. Girls were brought up and educated under the vigilant supervision of sisters and staff living in the community. Today, Bethany is no longer a village, but a city with a population of over 20,000 people and the school is a permanent private school in the local district. Now servicing both Christian and Muslim Arab children, the school of Bethany has been and remains one of the best girls' schools in the area.
- Over 85 years have passed since the establishment of the Orthodox School of Bethany, and it continues to be a true staple in the community. Representatives of Palestine's Ministry of Education, as well as parents and teachers alike, share in the opinion that our school is a true asset to Bethany. Not only are our students obtaining a rich and academically-sound education but remain surrounded by love and support from teachers and sisters of St. Mary Magdalene Convent (Gethsemane).
- The charity tradition and principles are maintained, and methods of teaching are constantly improving. Like in the old days, some of the children who are unable to live with family, due to certain circumstances, board here under full supervision and guidance of the Gethsemane Community.
- With ages ranging from 4-17, we have approximately 450 girls enrolled in our school. Students follow an academic curriculum in accordance with Palestinian standards, with focus on Arabic and English languages, mathematics and natural sciences. Additionally, all students are required to study the Russian language starting in the 3rd grade.

- Studies of religion are taught separately for Christian and Muslim students.
- Children with learning difficulties are taught separately depending on needs.



Why do children like to study at our school?

- More than 40 qualified teachers work in our school and many of them are alumni of our program.
- All teachers approach their work in a rigorous, yet creative manner. The constant search for best teaching approaches, and the use of new methods, result in us not only providing our students with necessary knowledge but also develops collective creativity and creative thinking.
- Special emphasis is made on principles of friendship and mutual respect. Over the years we have developed a system that has allowed students to grasp-in play form- the wide sphere of knowledge, which is paramount to their future.
- As possible, various excursions are organized on a regular basis including but not limited to, archeological digs, local history explorations, visits to the zoo, visits to The New Testament sites in Galilee and more.
- Students, and teachers alike, really enjoy preparing for traditional school celebrations such as graduation day, St. Nicholas Day, Mother's Day, and more. Traditionally, all feast days are conducted in three languages: Arabic, Russian and English.

WE ARE	Glad that our former students are experts in various fields
WE HAVE	Faith that our school is needed and our work not useless
WE KNOW	That the work of Bethany's sisters Martha and Mary continues, and that this work preserves Love in this ancient Holy Land
WE PRAY	That our Savior, who visited His friends here, will continue to visit our Bethany Community