A monastery is the home of any community of monks or nuns. Unlike a hermitage, where a single religious individual often lived alone, at least two persons have to reside together in a monastery. Some Christian-oriented monasteries comprised 12 monks and an abbot, in imitation of Jesus of Nazareth and the apostles. A monastery had two main sources of protection: it was normally associated with a local ruler or noble family (often, those lay protectors had the right to appoint abbots and abbesses from their own kin), and it was made sacred by the reputation of its patron saint.

Many religious traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism, have monasteries as sites of religious communities.

Encyclopedia of Irish Spirituality

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