

New Land! New Future!

by Sr Ellen Francis, OSH

In the summer of 2008, the Order of Saint Helena announced that we would be selling the two OSH convents in New York State and temporarily consolidating the Order in Augusta GA. We decided that when the time was right, we would sell the Augusta property as well, for we dreamed of building a custom-designed, “green” convent.

These plans were somewhat put on hold by the downturn in the economy. The house and land in Vails Gate NY did sell in the fall of 2009, but our house in New York City didn’t even get a nibble. We took it off the market, and decided to concentrate on getting settled in Augusta. The move took far more spiritual, psychological and physical energy than we expected, but gradually we settled and started to look forward to what could still be possible for us as an Order.

We considered remodeling the convent in Augusta once again but discovered that we didn’t have enough building space and that it would be very expensive to rework the existing buildings which were designed to house only six sisters. At the moment, 15 of 17 sisters are living here!

Last January, we began the search for a new piece of property where we could build a new convent. Although the economy is poor for selling property, it turned out to be a good time to buy. We also decided that we wanted to stay in or near Augusta because of our many friends in this area and our long history of ministry here. Additionally, other than the Sisters of St Mary in Sewanee TN, we are the only Episcopal monastic Order in the southeastern US. We have access to excellent medical facilities and appreciate a moderate cost of living and a relatively mild climate.

After looking at a number of properties, both with and without existing buildings, we came across one that we loved: partly wooded and bordering on a large wooded area, in an area zoned to prohibit high density and commercial building. Most of this property has been cleared except for a few clusters of trees and a stretch of gorgeous, tall hardwoods around the perimeter. Many of us have felt a welcoming spirit in this land.

We are delighted to announce that our offer was accepted on April 20, and we are now the grateful owners of 28 acres in Aiken County, South Carolina, which has been approved for incorporation into the city of North Augusta.

The property is just across the Savannah River, about 20 minutes north of the Augusta convent. Although we will be residing in the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, we will continue to serve the Church in all neighboring dioceses, as we have done for the past 51 years. And we’ll continue sending sisters throughout the US to preach, lead workshops and parish programs, to co-host Associates gatherings and to speak about OSH and monastic life.

Our next step will be to work on the specifications for the new convent and to search for an architect who can help us realize our dream. We hope you will join us in prayer and thanksgiving for the blessings that have been showered on us, and keep us in your prayers in the future. Our dream includes building a “green” and environmentally friendly facility which can continue to house sisters, provide hospitality to guests, and be a place of prayer, rest, refuge and renewal.



Garments of Praise

By Sr Grace, n/OSH

Isaiah exclaims that God will provide "...a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." (Isaiah 61:3b, NIV)

In July, the St Helena sisters undertook an in-house sewing project with an ambitious goal: to start and complete 15 white albs in one week! The idea was to make (rather than purchase) white garments that would go over our street clothes and allow sisters to have a uniform appearance in the chapel. By prayerful teamwork, this was joyfully accomplished.

What made the experience so special was that sisters contributed their gifts as able. First, Ruth (at age 86) committed to pray for the alb project and participants. CA and BL organized a schedule of events. EF and Gr began the process early by making a few sample garments to try on. BL assisted in the choice and purchase of fabric and served as cook for the week. Cornelia beautifully embroidered each sister's initials. LJ and AP applied snaps and Velcro, then measured, basted, and stitched hems.

Other sisters speedily straight-stitched or zigzagged a dozen spools of thread on five sewing machines. CP took photographs to document the entire journey. With frayed edges snipped and tucked, the garments were washed, ironed, and hung with care. This alone was no simple task!

Until recently, the OSH sisters have worn white skirts and blouses of their choice to Matins and Eucharist. These were called "short" habits, as opposed to the formal long habits still worn for corporate Chapter, festal occasions and missions such as preaching or leading adult education programs in parishes, offering workshops, and giving talks about OSH and monastic life in the Episcopal Church.

The short habit had evolved into a variety of styles, lengths, and shades of "white" expressing the ingenious creativity of each sister. Choir chairs



in the chapel were also adorned year-round with a number of colorful blankets, shawls, and other wraps as needed for warmth. After morning services, sisters would return to their rooms to change into street attire for the rest of the day's activities. We finally had to admit we had become too eclectic a sight in chapel and needed to clean up our act!

To mend our mismatched ways, some researched the purchase of professionally made albs. Cost and availability became an issue as well as the limited selection of fabrics and sizes. Oh, this wasn't working either.

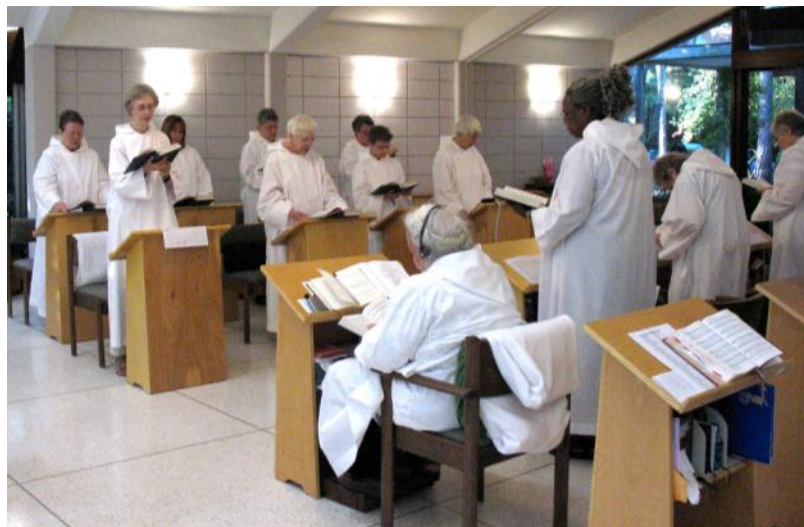
Then a NEW thought emerged: perhaps if we pooled the talents of the sisters, we could make our *own* garments and save the Order a great expense. Nine bolts of fabric later, we had only invested about \$400 (four times less than a catalog purchase).

That week, in the refectory and Hermitage house, we were surrounded by the sounds of humming machines and hissing irons. A noticeable contemplative peace surrounded each sewing station. Sisters seemed to really enjoy the group experience. Each participating sister offered a unique expression of love to each other through the alb project – another deeply satisfying benefit.

As the project neared completion, Linda Elston said,

"I am living proof that making albs was a very forgiving process. I ripped out a number of seams and started over. Mary Lois' alb was the last one I worked on, and I managed to sew the front of the pocket to the left side of the alb and the back of the pocket to the right side."

But **new** means **change**. Sisters are
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The Reverend Canon Mary Michael Simpson, OSH

December 1, 1925—July 20, 2011

By Sr Cintra Pemberton, OSH

In the same way that Daniel Boone was a trail blazer and pioneer, so was Mary Michael a trail blazer and pioneer for women's rights in the Church and in the religious life.

She was born in December 1925, and her early childhood was greatly affected by her family's struggles through the Depression years. She said of herself she "sprang from the womb kicking and spitting" and never denied her intransigent and passionate nature. It was a nature that shaped her into a strong leader, a powerful force for issues she believed in – and blazing trails for women was a lifelong passion.

Although born in Indiana where her father worked for the Studebaker Corporation, Mary Michael's family roots were in Texas. She graduated from Texas State College for Women in Denton TX, and went on from there to pursue graduate studies in history and then philosophy at Columbia University and Hunter College in New York City.

She entered the Order of St Helena in 1952 and was life professed in 1956. As a member of the Order, she served as academic head of Margaret Hall School in Versailles KY, as sister in charge of the convent in Bolahun, Liberia, and during the 1960s as novitiate director, back in the US.

It was during the '60s that Mary Michael began pioneering for more freedom and openness in the religious life, at least in OSH. One of her first actions was to decide smoking was permissible, although after we learned the dangers of smoking, she was one of the first to give it up. She questioned the need to wear the habit at all times, and gradually sisters began to wear secular clothes when not in chapel. Also, the so-called "short habit" was introduced at her urging.

Mary Michael was especially passionate about the veil, a strong symbol of the subjection of women, and she fought hard against wearing it. There were other routines and requirements with the Order (as within almost all communities) that



were seen to be dehumanizing and demeaning of women, and Mary Michael was a leader in encouraging OSH to do away with them. She wanted each woman free to grow into the unique person God had intended her to be, not to become a "pea in a pod."

She graduated from the Westchester Institute for Training in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in 1976 and received an

STM from the General Theological Seminary in 1982, after which she studied Bowen Family Systems for two years at the Princeton Family Center. She remained a psychoanalyst in private practice for the rest of her life, even when she was living in a nursing home.

In 1977 Mary Michael was ordained to the priesthood, a true pioneer of the church. She was the first woman religious to be ordained in the Anglican Communion and the first woman canon of a cathedral. A year after ordination, she made a five-week preaching tour of England under the sponsorship of the Christian Parity Group (later known as the Movement for the Ordination of Women) in an effort to forward the cause of the ordination of women to the priesthood, and she was the first ordained woman to preach in Westminster Abbey. She was the first woman candidate for bishop in the Anglican Communion.

From 1977 through 1986 Mary Michael served as canon residentiary of the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City. She established the Cathedral Counseling Service and was consulting psychotherapist for Union Theological Seminary. After being in charge of a small parish in Westchester County, she returned

to New York City and for several years was involved in interim ministry, both as pastor and consultant, as well as offering conflict consulting in parishes for the Diocese of New York and conducting parish workshops on family systems. During this period she was recognized at the United Nations as a "legendary woman."

Mary Michael always stayed in close touch



Sharing memories after the funeral are Mary Michael's nephew Frank, her brother Frank, with Ellen Francis and Mary Lois.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS, PROGRAMS, CELEBRATIONS

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GUEST MINISTRY & HOSPITALITY

This fall, the OSH sisters will focus our guest ministry on serving those of you who just need a break, to get away for a few days of rest and refreshment, to soak up the peace of hearing Gregorian chant, go for walks in the woods and be among friends for whom spirituality is central to life. As you know, several sisters are gifted spiritual directors who'd be happy to meet with you during your stay.

CALLING ALL WEARY CLERGY! We offer you one free night's stay in our guest house. One suggestion is to arrive on a Sunday afternoon or evening and stay through Monday which is typically the sisters' day in silence. Come when your schedule permits (or even if it doesn't) and make a brief or extended personal retreat, with spiritual direction or counseling if you desire.

Register for all events and overnight accommodations through the convent guest office at the phone number or email given above. A deposit is required to hold your reservation. Workshop deposits are one-half the program cost. Guest house reservations are \$60 per night per person, with a deposit of \$60 required. Guest deposits are nonrefundable but are transferrable unless otherwise stated. Please make checks payable to "OSH" and mail c/o Guest Registrar. Overnight accommodations include three meals daily. Day programs include lunch. *Please register for accommodations and programs early as your financial contributions are our means to afford fine outside speakers.*

WORKSHOPS, RETREATS, & MORE

MINDFULNESS and THE WHEEL OF HEALTH, a workshop with **Trina Ford**, Certified Integrative Health Coach. Saturday, November 5, 9:30 – 4:00. *(Please note this date change).* Program cost \$95 with \$50 deposit (nonrefundable, non-transferable); includes lunch.

Explore the seven dimensions of self care through mindful awareness. Mindfulness practice? It's not what you think. YOU are the center of your health. When you pay attention to the present moment...without judgment...you have the opportunity to experience the benefits of health in body and soul. By being more present and aware of what is happening within you, you can live a life that is grounded in a deep sense of purpose.

All participants registered by October 1 will receive Duke University's Integrative Health Plan Manual and a personal health coaching session with Trina – both absolutely FREE! This beautiful manual is 164 pages of self-discovery and incredible resources for health and well-being.

Registration after October 1 is \$95 plus \$25.00 fee for manual (which is required for the program). Workshop Essentials: dress for comfort and mindful movement. Bring a yoga mat, pillow, small blanket and an open mind.

Trina Ford is a Certified Integrative Health Coach trained by Duke Integrative Medicine in Durham NC. She completed the Mindfulness Training for Professionals with Dr Jeff Brantley at Duke Integrative Medicine and is a mentor for the Integrative Health Coach Training Program in Durham. Trina has a National Certification in Massage and Bodywork and specializes in acute and chronic care. She is a Certified Neuromuscular Re-education therapist and Certified Yoga teacher. Trina is also a yoga therapist and has two certifications in meditation teacher training in the yoga tradition. For more information about Trina, see www.integrativehealthnow.com.

FOUNDERS DAY FESTAL EUCHARIST: The Order of St Helena turns 66 years old on Tuesday, November 8. Please join us for Holy Eucharist at 8:15 am, and stay for breakfast, too, if you can.

I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME, an Advent retreat with **Sr Carol Andrew, OSH**. December 9 - 11, beginning with 5:30 pm Vespers on Friday and concluding with dinner on Sunday. Program fee \$80.

"Thus says the One who created you, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'" Together we will look into the spiritual and emotional blocks that prevent us from knowing that we are beloved of God, accepted as we are, and given meaningful ministry to others, no matter how weak we feel.

Sister Carol Andrew's retreats are among the most popular at the convent. There is something about her combination of wisdom, gentleness and humor that eases the mind and opens participants to experiences of spiritual and emotional healing. As priest, Carol Andrew currently serves at the Church of St Mary Magdalene in Louisville GA, as well as filling in for other churches whose priests are away or ill. *It's no secret that Carol Andrew loves animals, and now she is the proud "mama" to Abby, the new convent puppy.*

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE CONVENT: You know the expression "KISS"? That stands for Keep It Simple, Sisters. This New Year's Eve, we will keep it simple and hope you will join us for any or all of our New Year's Eve events: On Saturday, December 31 at 5:30 pm, we'll chant the festal Vespers of the Feast of the Holy Name, starting with the "Service of Light." From 6:30 until 9:00 pm, we'll serve refreshments and enjoy light-hearted merry-making. **RSVP** to the

guest phone or email with the number in your party.

ICON WORKSHOP 2012 led by **Fr Damian Higgins**. Wednesday, February 29 at 7:00 pm: an introduction to iconography, \$15 per person, all welcome. Thursday morning, March 1 – Sunday afternoon, March 4: Hands-on learning and "writing" (painting) icons. \$375 with \$187 deposit, meals included. Registration deadline is February 22. All materials are provided and each participant will complete an icon. No previous experience or art training required. Register soon as space is limited to eleven people. Guest house reservations are a separate expense.

The monthly **WISDOM GROUP** continues to learn from Adyashanti, a spiritual teacher who emerged from the Zen tradition and reflects on all great spiritual masters. Adyashanti's focus is on realizing one's True Nature. He dares "all seekers of peace and freedom to take the possibility of liberation seriously." His website is www.adyashanti.org. Adyashanti's talks have been recorded since 2003, and we watch and reflect on one DVD at each gathering. We meet in the convent reception room one Saturday per month from 9:30 until noon. Upcoming dates are September 10 and October 22. If you'd like to attend these gatherings, please contact Sr Linda at 706-798-5201 or sisters@osh.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Former sisters Veronica Aryeequaye and Lesley Morgan have left the Order of St Helena, as has postulant Laura Szachewicz. We wish them well as they pursue new endeavors.

Know anyone who needs a five-story brownstone in New York City? The former Manhattan convent is for sale, and that sale is crucial to our plans for building the new convent in North Augusta. Please spread the good word, and see the details at <http://massey.knakal.com>.

Seeking a life of prayer and service? Curious about monastic life? Contact Sr Ellen Francis, Vocations Director, at sisters@osh.org or 706-798-5201.

DONATIONS TO OSH: The life of the convent and sisters is dependent on the Holy Spirit and the generous gifts from people such as you. Please consider including OSH in your will and making donations to our work and witness in memory or in honor of a loved one. Contact Sr Ellen Francis at <http://www.osh.org> or 706-798-5201. Thank you very much for supporting the future of the Order and the sisters' lives.



Sr Rosina

*Her
Where-
abouts*

and

*Her
Work*



We are so proud for Sr Rosina! She is pictured here with her newly published book, *The Beautiful Cloth, Stories & Proverbs of Ghana*. This little jewel is full of stories that Rosina's parents and grandparents told her growing up (her grandfather was Master of Proverbs in her village), and which Rosina continues to tell as part of her ministry. Wanting to preserve the oral tradition in writing, the stories are now available to you in book form through Yellow Moon Press: www.yellowmoon.com or 800-497-4385.

As you may know, Sr Rosina is currently working HARD in Ghana as the supervisor on record, training clergy and lay persons with the skills of Indigenous Clinical Pastoral Education using St Nicholas Seminary as her training base. She is working at present with the Central Regional Hospital in Cape Coast

which the trainees are using as their practicum site. She just finished her first unit with her "inaugural" trainees and is planning to offer a summer unit of Indigenous CPE to the seminarians in 2012.

What is unique about Rosina's work is that she specialized her own intense supervisory training at Episcopal Health Services, St John's Episcopal Hospital, Far Rockaway NY, Diocese of Long Island, as an indigenous supervisor in order to go to Ghana to establish the program. Pictured above are Rosina's current trainees as well as the Rev Dr Steven Voytovich, second from left, CPE Director of Episcopal Health Services in Long Island; in the center is the Rt Rev Daniel Allotey, Diocesan Bishop of Cape Coast. Rosina is shown third from right. You may email her at sisters@osh.org.

Garments continued

slowly making the transition. For example, there is still a learning curve on how to get in and out of these albs. One sister suggested we come to the Daily Offices early enough to have time to "climb in." JT says that sometimes she puts her alb on the way they teach kindergarten kids to put on their jackets, diving in headfirst. Imagine that!

Sisters who are usually cold in the chapel are generally happy to be wrapped in an additional three yards of fabric. But this is not so much the case for the warm-blooded sisters, who seek relief near any friendly source of air circulation. It's not only the garments that may require some attention and alteration; sometimes it's our bodies and inner spirits as well.

All in all, the new albs have been a blessing and gift to our community prayer life. Mary Lois thinks of her alb as a "prayer cocoon." The garments unify externally what is our individual and corporate goal in Spirit: to love and serve God through prayer and active ministry as the sisters of the Order of Saint Helena. All praise be to God!



Sr Grace

Mary Michael continued



with her personal family. She is survived by her younger brother Frank, with whom she had a close relationship from the time he was a baby. Every year she faithfully visited her many family members in the Houston area, usually at Christmas time, and at other times as she was able. Even when she was in a wheelchair and needed a nurse assistant companion with her, she still

went regularly to Texas to be with her family.

Although Mary Michael lived apart from the community convents for much of the time she was a sister, she was always strongly bonded to the community and was intentional about building and maintaining strong relationships with individual sisters. She loved OSH and seldom missed a Chapter or general meeting. However, when time came for a formal meeting to end, hers was the first voice, always, to call out, "I move we adjourn." She will be sorely missed.

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Thank you for your prayerful responses and financial support of our ministries. And thank you for an annual contribution in support of the newsletter's publication. Please mail checks made to "OSH" c/o Sr Linda Elston. If you would like to begin receiving the newsletter or if your contact information changes, please write to the convent or email us at augofficemgr@comcast.net.

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The Order of St Helena is a religious community for women in the Anglican Communion, founded in 1945, which witnesses to a contemporary version of traditional monasticism.



*Rest in Peace
Sr Mary Michael Simpson, OSH*

OUR COMMUNITY—JULY 2011

*Row 1: Srs Linda and Grace
Row 2: Srs Cintra Pemberton, Ruth, Benedicta, Barbara Lee, June Thomas
Row 3: Srs Faith Anthony, Mary Lois, Ann Prentice, Ellen Stephen, Cornelia, Rosina
Row 4: Srs Linda Julian, Ellen Francis, Carol Andrew (not shown: Sr Elsie)*

