



The Work of Christmas

Each year, as November becomes December, I remember how my mother decorated early and beautifully for Christmas. Colored lights were hung on the house, and a giant wreath could be seen from the street. A pine tree stood as tall as the living room ceiling with ornaments, lights, and silver tinsel icicles. The "Christmas lamp," a porcelain angel holding a lighted candle, stood in a cloud of white angel hair. A creche of plaster figures with paint loved off edges and faces sat in straw. A stack of classic Christmas books and stories were set at an angle on the coffee table. An antique glass pickle barrel was filled with Christmas cookies – green trees and wreaths, red reindeer and Santas, and gingerbread folk with chopped dates for buttons. A bow of red ribbon, ironed anew every year, held ancient and shriveled mistletoe in a doorway; and sequined, bejeweled stockings hung in waiting for Christmas morning. It was beautiful and we loved it, and it was **a lot** of work.

Through my growing years this was the work of Christmas – the decorating (and the undecorating!), the shopping, the gifting, the cooking, the hosting. And while some of this continues in my life, even in the monastery, today I lean more toward Howard Thurman's idea of the work of Christmas:



Left to right: Sr. Rosina, Sr. Ellen Stephen, Sr. Ann

The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*

Thurman reminds us that Christmas is more than a day or a season that we prepare for and clean up afterward. Christmas is a way of life, a way of being, a living vocation that binds us with the Divine. Christmas shines a light on God's call for us to help make our world more just, healthy and peaceful. As God-With-Us is born into a world torn apart by partisanship, prejudice, political instability and war, the work of Christmas will take all of us, working together with God, for the transformation of the world.

– Sr. Miriam Elizabeth, OSH

*How has the work of Christmas changed for you?
What does your work of Christmas look like this year?*



Convent of Saint Helena, North Augusta

The Home I Didn't Know I Needed

My first visit was at the insistence of my friend, the Rev. Nancy D. Stevens. She is an associate of the Order of Saint Helena and knew I was exhausted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I was resistant to visiting. I had a busy work schedule and a failing marriage I was trying to salvage. I also knew I needed some rest and discernment.

Nancy drove me to the convent in Vails Gate, NY. It sat on more than fifty acres along the Moodna Creek, near the Hudson River.

As we entered the foyer, the first thing I noticed was a shift in my energy. I was still exhausted, yet I immediately felt a tranquility I had not felt in months. I felt like something or someone had wrapped me in a cocoon that extracted the tension from my body and spirit.

We were greeted by Sr. Ann Prentice, given some orientation, and taken to our rooms. I met the other sisters during our meals. Sr. Benedicta led a retreat, *Praying with the God Who Comes*. It was a series of meditations sprinkled with reflections by Hafiz and Rumi and periods of silence. I can still hear her opening prayer:

Author of the world's joy.
Bearer of the world's pain.
At the heart of all our distress.
let unconquerable gladness dwell.
To see you is the end and the beginning.
You carry me and you go before.
You are the journey and the journey's end.

– Attributed to Henry S. Nash



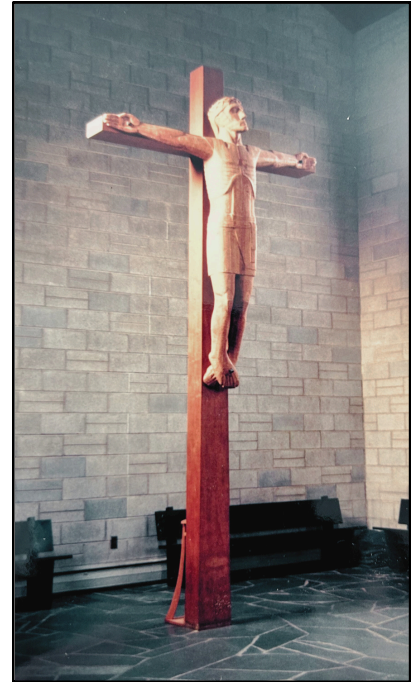
The Rev. Rhonda Rogers, Associate since 2008

I was bathed in peace and filled with awe when I entered the chapel that evening. I caught my breath when I saw the sixteen-foot crucifix behind the altar. I was drawn to sit at Jesus' feet. The rhythm of the Daily Offices, while familiar, felt richer because of the inclusive language.

I returned to Vails Gate multiple times over the next year. In October 2008, I became an associate of the order. I maintain a rule of life, pray for the sisters and support their ministries.

When they moved to Augusta, GA and subsequently North Augusta, SC, I continued my visits. The convent is along the Savannah River now, not the Hudson. The chapel and guest house are different. But the wisdom, hospitality, and compassion welcome me each time. I still leave the sisters well-fed and rested, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is the home I didn't know I needed.

– The Rev. Rhonda Rogers



The Bethany Guest House

We are pleased to announce the reopening of our guest house one weekend a month, and we look forward to welcoming you! Our guest house features eight comfortable single rooms, each equipped with a private bathroom and individual temperature controls. Guests will have access to a fully equipped kitchen, along with complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the guest house and the main convent building. Our guest house and convent are spaces of intentional quiet, allowing space for the Holy Spirit to speak. If silence feels unfamiliar, know you are supported—our staff is here for you, the sisters are praying for you, and God is near.

To join us, please register on our website at <https://www.osh.org/visit>.

Upcoming Dates
December 19 - 21 - [registration](#)
January 23 - 25 - [registration](#)
February 27 - March 1 - [registration](#)
March 20 - 22 - [registration](#)
April 24 - 26 - [registration](#)



Religious Life Sunday

The 3rd Sunday in Epiphany, January 25, 2026, will be the 4th annual observance of Religious Life Sunday—a day in the liturgical year to celebrate, promote, and learn about monks and nuns, sisters and brothers, and friars in The Episcopal Church.

We believe that religious life has something to offer everyone in the church! At the Order of Saint Helena, we invite you to share the good news about religious life and celebrate with us.

Here are some of the gifts of religious life to the church:

- Rest, retreat, and silent time at a convent or monastery
- Workshops and programs to enhance the spiritual journey
- Spiritual friendship and spiritual direction
- Online resources: programs, videos, and writings about religious life
- Speakers who offer presentations on religious life and many other spiritual topics
- Counsel on writing and living a rule of life in the world
- Monastic traditions and spiritual practices for everyone
- Opportunities to support and remain connected as an associate or oblate
- Vocational discernment to a religious order or Christian community

To learn more:

Religious Orders in The Episcopal Church: caroa.net

Christian Communities in The Episcopal Church: naecc.net

For resources and more information visit: religiouslifesunday.net

Also see our videos about religious life:

<https://www.youtube.com/@religiouslifesunday>

Collect For Monastic Orders and Vocations:

O Lord Jesus Christ, you became poor for our sake, that we might be made rich through your poverty: Guide and sanctify, we pray, those whom you call to follow you under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, that by their prayer and service they may enrich your Church, and by their life and worship may glorify your Name; for you reign with the Creator and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(BCP, p. 819)



CAROA Leaders October 2025
(Conference of Anglican Religious Orders in the Americas)