

## BEAUTY ALONG THE WAY



Seated: Sisters Mary Lois, Rosina and Ellen Stephen  
Standing: Sisters Faith, Sam, Carol Andrew, Ellen Francis, Miriam Elizabeth, Ann and Linda

### CONVENT OF SAINT HELENA

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We will notify you in advance when we know the guesthouse is reopening!



Srs Ellen Stephen and Faith



Sr. Faith: Near the end of my days in the D.C. area, electricity went off and it was getting dark. So, what else can I do except for enjoying the sky, trees, flickering candles, quiet dim hotel room, and lights of other buildings and freeways? The beauty of a powerless evening. 🙏

## BEAUTY

Sr. Ellen Stephen, OSH

O God of glories without number—why would you delight in me, this almost naught?

I give my fellow creatures little thought—this rusted frond, this iridescent fly.

How can you hold the sun-blazed nightly sky in the same grasp in which a pebble's caught?

Indeed, indeed, what beauties have you wrought!

They stretch my skull-confined capacity!

In prayer you gently help me realize how I am dazzled by sheer quantity:

all answers that would limit you are lies—you make both atom and infinity.

You are, beyond all images of size; and in your image, I must simply be.



Sr. Mary Lois: In order to really love a dog, I won't try to train her to be semi-human. The point of it is to open myself to the possibility of becoming partly dog. Meet Sasha, the Treeing Walker Coonhound rescue.



Sr. Ellen Francis: From a peach pit I planted, this cute little sprout holds promise of delicious fruit in years to come!

Sr. Rosina: I see flowers and plants as reminders of God's creation. One puts a small seed in the soil and before long you have a huge plant and bushels of flowers. Flowers remind me of celebration and prayers. I wonder how the tiny seeds turn into bushels of flowers? Flowers bring me closer to God!



The little peach tree has graduated to a new pot and life outdoors in the sun!



Giving the peach tree some encouragement with a locally-grown peach!



A lovely slice of the convent backyard with purple martin houses in the foreground.



Sr. Linda: I love trees. Thirty years ago, I returned to college to complete a bachelor's degree. My first semester, I took botany. Our study of photosynthesis was complex enough that I have since marveled that all the food in the world comes from sunlight hitting green leaves. Botany class rekindled my flagging relationship with God.



Sr. Miriam Elizabeth: I am fascinated by the sun, moon, clouds and stars and try to spend a little time each morning or evening enjoying the beauty of the sky. I love to watch the colors change in the minutes of a sunrise or sunset, deep and saturated into light and pale. Seeking the first or the last star I can see in the night sky, tracking the moon through its phases, and noticing the planets as they come into view reminds me of the vastness of creation and the glory of the Creator.



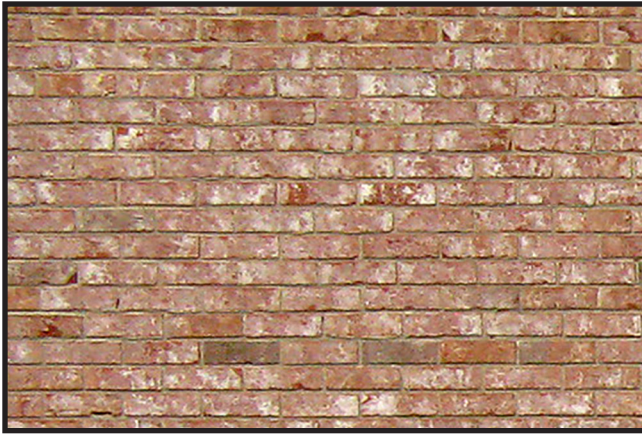
Sr. Sam: I recently transplanted a seedling into a new pot. Tending to it gently and consistently, I was glad for it to be alive in the sun but didn't notice a lot of growth. Within the past couple of weeks, though, some rain came down at unexpected times, and I was captivated by this sight: new life, cruciform variant. We pray for such a beautiful blessing of rainfall in all of our lives.



Sr. Ann: Since I was a child, I've loved working with cut flowers. The variety of colors and forms enchants me. A spot of beauty in front of the altar and on a refectory table, with smaller vases here and there around the convent delight my heart. And if I need something to lift my spirit, arranging a few flowers will do it!

Srs Sam and Ellen Francis knit during informal community gatherings.





## HITTING THE WALL

Some months ago, just when I thought the COVID trends were getting better and just when I thought I was doing ok and coping pretty well—I hit the wall. I didn't even see it coming. Like walking into a glass door with no warning, I was suddenly pancake-flat against an immovable surface.

Once I realized what had happened, I was feeling a little sheepish. After all, I'm a religious sister and should know how to manage my spiritual life! I should know how to pray myself out of any predicament!

COVID-tide stretches on (and on, and on, and O Lord, how long??), and other world challenges continue to demand our attention and prayer. Sometimes I manage to stay centered and calm and patient. Sometimes anxiety and my least-good self gets the better of me. Sometimes I just try to get through the day.

In these times, the Daily Office has been sustaining me more than ever. Each day, I can move deeply into the scriptures and into the chants that have echoed in monastic chapels for centuries. As we sing the ancient psalm tones, the beauty of the music lifts me up, and I sometimes

hear an echo of the endless alleluias of the angels in heaven. The well-turned cadences of the language of the Office touch my heart and resonate with my soul.

I am drawn away from the immediate sadness and grief, into an eternal time, where the present troubles appear in proportion to the many vicissitudes of human history. In this process, I'm not dropping out of the current troubles, nor turning my back, but rather tapping into the deep well of God's faithfulness and healing goodness. I can name the many challenges of the present time and name the individuals who have asked for our prayers, and then give these over to the One who can gently hold all our grief with eternal compassion.

I have since peeled myself off the wall and straightened my glasses. I try to keep connecting with the deep well of spiritual sustenance I receive from companionship with my sisters, from our communal prayer, and from the presence of the Divine which always encourages me on the path.

—Sr. Ellen Francis, OSH

*How has your prayer changed during the time of COVID? What are you praying for now?*

Ordinary of Vespers 123

### ORDINARY OF VESPERS

*Officiant:* O God, make speed to save us.      *Response:* O God, make haste to help us.

*All:* Glory to the holy and undivided Trini-ty, one God:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for-ev-er. A-men. Al - le - lu - ia.