



ORDER OF
SAINT HELENA

March 2026 Newsletter

Love God and neighbor.

The Interview Project

As we move into the next year or two, we'll be sharing information about sisters, gleaned in interviews for our archives. Sisters are asked three questions: What brought you to The Order of Saint Helena? What do you consider your most impactful ministry or work during your past years as a sister of OSH? Where do you find yourself today in your life and ministry as a sister?



Sr. Ellen Stephen, OSH
Seeking What Is Real



Sr. Carol Andrew, OSH
A Life Drawn Toward God

When asked what brought her to The Order of Saint Helena (OSH), Sr. Ellen Stephen (ES) laughed gently. "It's a long story—I even wrote a whole book about it," she said. But if she had to offer a short version, it would be this: she was searching for truth.

Growing up, she lived in what she described as "an environment that refused to acknowledge reality." From an early age, she felt an urgent need to discover what was "real, what was good, what could truly nurture me, and what held genuine beauty."

That longing shaped the course of her life.

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Sr. Carol Andrew's vocation to The Order of Saint Helena (OSH) began with a deep and early attraction to God. "As a young teenager, I found myself far more interested in God than in most of the people around me," she recalled recently. Around the age of twelve, she met a sister from OSH visiting her parish church. Intrigued, she asked to visit the convent where the sister lived. That visit marked the beginning of a lifelong connection. From that point forward, she never seriously considered a religious order other than OSH.

As she continued her education, Sr. Carol Andrew pursued theology and biblical studies,

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Sr. Ellen Stephen, OSH *continued*

Her search unfolded over many years and through many disciplines including art, scholarship, writing, and drama—each an attempt to find beauty and meaning. Yet midway through her life, she found herself in a place of deep darkness. It was then that someone suggested she seek God.

That suggestion changed everything.

What began as an intellectual quest gradually became a journey of surrender. Sr. ES moved from analyzing ideas about God to entrusting herself to God. Her mentor in England, who later baptized her, encouraged her to consider a religious order. He introduced her to Father Turkington of The Order of the Holy Cross, who in turn introduced her to Sr. Alice, then assistant superior of The Order of Saint Helena.

Reflecting on her years in the Order, Sr. ES hesitated when asked about her most impactful ministry. “You would have to ask the people who were—or were not—impacted,” she said. “I don’t think we ever really see the full effect of our work.” She noted that even Jesus may have felt at times that “he failed to convey his message.” She has also felt that sometimes she hasn’t communicated her message.

When pressed, she suspected her writing has been among her strongest contributions. She has authored several books, though she admitted they may not have been received in the way she had once hoped.

Her Community Building work has also left a lasting mark. For decades, people have asked her to repeat her talk on “emptiness,” a theme that continues to resonate with facilitators of the work. Many have told her that the work changed their lives. Others have spoken of the transformative effect of spiritual direction under her guidance. Yet Sr. ES remained cautious about claiming results. “You never really know,” she said.



Living in community and facilitating Community Building workshops have made up much of Sr. Ellen Stephen’s life.

Over the years, she led hundreds of parish missions, traveling widely—from Vancouver, Canada to Sri Lanka, across Europe, and to many places in between. Filing cabinets full of records document the churches she visited. More cabinets hold notes from Community Building workshops and facilitation work conducted around the world.

Still, when asked to name the best thing she has done, her answer is simple: loving people. Beyond books, workshops, and missions, she believes love has been her most faithful work.

Today, Sr. ES finds herself in a quieter season. She is recovering from a foot injury and waiting to return fully to chapel life. She hopes to resume her writing and complete another book, “if that’s what God wants,” she says. When asked whether this time feels like forced patience, she responds with clarity. She does not feel stuck. She does not even consider herself particularly patient. “I’m very much a ‘now’ person,” she says. “I’m simply here.”

Surrounded by caring sisters and staff, she feels supported and held. She has prayer. She has good books. She trusts that God is healing her.

For Sr. ES, the search for what is real has led not to restless striving, but to presence—to being exactly where she is meant to be.



Sr. Carol Andrew and Sr. Rosina Ampah at the Augusta convent on Ascension Day 1996.

believing academic study would help her know God. While she learned much, the experience felt incomplete. “It was,” she said, “like reading a biography—learning about God in the third person—rather than encountering God personally.” Eventually, she recognized that what she longed for was not simply knowledge about God, but a “deeper, firsthand experience of God.”

In 1970, at the age of 22, she entered the convent to devote her life “to seeking God in a focused and wholehearted way.”

At the time, conversations about women’s ordination were emerging in the church, though priesthood was not yet an interest for her. Even if it had been, she doubts she would have pursued it. “I had no desire to stand in front of people and speak,” she admitted. She was content in the quiet anonymity of the back pew.

Yet her path unfolded differently. Over time, she found herself called into priesthood—a development she now views with both humility and humor. “I sometimes joke that God led me into the priesthood simply to make sure I would have to preach,” she says. What began as reluctance became central to her ministry, not only seeking God for herself but helping others encounter God as well.

When reflecting on her most impactful work, Sr. Carol Andrew pointed to two areas—one outward facing and one within the community.

In her external ministry, preaching and teaching have been most significant. Over the years, she has led church services, quiet days, and retreats, often discovering the impact of her work through unexpected encounters. Someone might tell her, “I heard you preach five years ago, and I still remember what you said,” or “that was exactly what I needed to hear today.” Such moments, repeated over decades, have reassured her that God uses her and her words.

Throughout her years in religious life, she has also offered spiritual direction. Whether in person or online during the COVID pandemic, this one-on-one ministry reflects the same calling that shapes her preaching: attentive listening for God’s presence.

Within the community, one of her most meaningful contributions has been helping sisters learn to chant the Daily Office. When she entered OSH, the sisters did not regularly sing or chant their prayers. Drawing on her musical training, Sr. Carol Andrew began teaching what she knew and helped the sisters “to reclaim a sung rhythm of prayer.” Over time, chanting became an integral part of the community’s common life, shaping its shared worship and spiritual identity.

Within the community, she is engaged in the careful work of revising and organizing chapel documentation—quiet, detailed work that sustains the community’s worship life. She has focused on mentoring newer members, sharing wisdom gained from decades of religious life and helping others grow into their vocations.

From a curious twelve-year-old convent visitor to a seasoned preacher, mentor, and spiritual director, Sr. Carol Andrew’s life has been guided by a single desire: not simply to know about God, but to know—and help others know—God personally and profoundly.

Alleluia?

As I write this in the early morning, the sun is just starting to show pink and yellow through the trees on the east side of the convent. One of our Matin hymns is running through my head, "Behold, another day is given for us to journey on towards heaven, when Christ invites us to awake, to work and love for Love's own sake."

Today is Shrove Tuesday. At the convent we are preparing for tomorrow's observation of Ash Wednesday and for beginning our journey through Lent. It seems too soon. It seems like we just barely settled into Epiphany season. It definitely feels too soon and too incongruous to be thinking ahead to Easter joy. How will "Alleluia" be sung this year? Will it be resonant, deep, and genuine? Or will it be a good intention that feels empty and hollow?

These are difficult, even agonizing, times for everyone, regardless of where one sits on the political spectrum. I'm finding it difficult to pray for national and world events—it all seems too large and terrible and out of control. The needs are too enormous; I can't get my heart and my arms around them.

Then I remember times when I have just been sitting quietly with God. These are not big knock-your-socks-off, mountain-top

experiences, just times of peace and stillness on my own little holy hilltop. Time and place melt away. I am entirely present in this one moment, and at the same time, I feel like I'm touching the edge of infinite, holy space. The great sweep of time and space open up to fill me with a sense of awe.



Then very quietly, as if coming from within a misty cloud, I hear God's voice, "Get up and do not be afraid. I got this."

And so, I'm reminded that God is in charge. This reassurance offers a solid sense of rest and consolation. It is a promise of God's faithfulness. It provides an opening into the

all-loving heart of God, which embraces all creation and events: the good, the bad, and the terrible.

Christ invites us to awake—to God's all-encompassing compassion, even and especially when we are feeling most alone and abandoned. God is calling us to get up and keep going and to "work and love for Love's own sake" so that on Easter morning we may sing out "Alleluia!" with joy in our hearts.

—Sr. Ellen Francis, OSH

Where do you find solace and even joy in difficult times? How could God's presence give you comfort in these days?

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