



Sister Cornelia,

November 29, 2012

Dear Friends in Christ,

We ask that you join us in celebrating the well-lived life of Cornelia Montgomery Ransom, a woman who made her life vows to God in the Episcopal Order of Saint Helena 45 years ago. Sister Cornelia died at 12:30 am on Tuesday, November 27, 2012, from the cumulative effects of Parkinson's Disease. Her funeral and burial will take place on Saturday, December 1 at 11:00 at the convent, 3042 Eagle Drive, Augusta, Georgia 30906-3326 (706-798-5201 ext 1). Rooms in our guest house are available at no charge for out-of-town guests. Memorial contributions may be made to the "Order of St. Helena" new convent building fund.

If Cornelia were asked, she would say she is survived by "many, many cousins." We especially want to honor her cousin Louise Ransom and her nieces Kate Shattuck and Kathryn Montgomery.

The Sisters of St. Helena thank the many professionals involved in Cornelia's care: Dr Kapil Sethi of Georgia Health Sciences Neurology Department, Dr Jonathan Reimer and the staff of the nursing home at The Place at Martinez, and the nurses and doctors at Doctor's Hospital, Augusta.

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Cornelia on a walk at Green Bough House of Prayer, Georgia, March 2010

Now for the story! As you'll see reading on, Cornelia devoted her life to serving God through serving others - her OSH community and people around the world. In her last few days of this life, she gave another sister a yarn and bead rosary and wanted it put with the other prayer beads she used for teaching children to pray.

Cornelia has been a leader, mentor, teacher and staunch believer in the role of women in society. A math major and Alumnae Award recipient at Wells College, Cornelia began teaching math at Sr. Mary's School for Indian Girls in Springfield, South Dakota, and then taught at St. Andrew's Priory School for Girls in Honolulu. While in Hawaii, she tried the business world but felt something deeply spiritual was missing from her life. Always the nature-lover, Cornelia often said one of her most difficult life decisions was leaving beautiful Hawaii. However, in 1962 she entered the Episcopal Order of St. Helena, making her life vow in 1967.

Sister Cornelia at her Life Profession

From 1968 to 1972 Sister Cornelia lived in Bolahun, Liberia, where she taught in the schools operated by the Order of the Holy Cross brothers and administered the girls' boarding residence. In 1973 she became the sister-in-charge of the Convent of St Helena in Vails Gate, New York, while continuing teaching in a drug rehabilitation center. In 1975 she became sister-in-charge of the Convent of St. Helena in Nassau, Bahamas, and was head of the Math Department at St. Anne's School.

Over the next ten years, Cornelia taught math and ministered to religious communities in Puerto Rico, Haiti, and the Bahamas. Back in New York City, she began her study of Cantonese and worked at the Church of Our Savior in Chinatown. She also taught English to Cambodian immigrant women.

Cornelia with Bahamian Associates Lorraine and Swithun Burrows, October 2012

Among the changes brought to Christianity by Vatican II, the Order of St. Helena embraced especially the new opportunities for women. Elected Superior of the Order in 1985, 1989 and 1993, Sister Cornelia led the community in changing its governance from an authoritarian hierarchy to a collegial group of four sisters acting in consensus as a Leadership Council. Cornelia said of her experience as the Order's last Superior, "I always made it a point to have a relationship with each sister."

As well as her pressing duties as Superior, Cornelia continued to travel and work in Europe, Asia, Africa and the US, leading to her nickname, "the flying nun." Because of her unique administrative talents, she was invited to visit other communities to consult and recommend changes. For one of her great passions, the Ecumenical Movement within Christian Churches, Cornelia attended ecumenical conferences in Rome and Canterbury, England.

Teaching Sunday School at Church of Our Savior, New York

Having always begun her day in meditation and prayer in the still-dark of the chapel, and at heart being very much the contemplative, Sister Cornelia's focus shifted in the mid-1990's. She began offering spiritual direction, often with seminary students at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, and conducting retreats. She also taught Sunday school for children at the Church of Our Savior in Chinatown, where she was much loved by all.

September 11, 2001 changed everything for everyone, and Sister Cornelia was no exception. During the dismantling of the Twin Towers, she spent every Sunday at Ground Zero in St. Paul's Chapel, which was open only to rescue workers inside the site. She was a pastoral presence, someone in whom the workers could confide. Cornelia had a special gift for easing others into a kind of conversational healing, both spiritually and emotionally. Many considered her a quiet but very powerful presence. One fire department worker who was on the job every day from September until June credited Cornelia with providing the motivation to help his crew effect over 400 recoveries. Other workers found Cornelia's sense of humor a godsend. (Just three days before she died, Cornelia was making jokes. The sister with her in ER said at one point, "Cornelia, you look like you're ready for some sleep." Cornelia opened one eye and retorted, "I'm not gonna miss a thing!")

Cornelia has continued to touch lives since her diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease and her moving with the entire community to Augusta in 2008. Twice she traveled to teach math to children at the Holy Cross school in South Africa. She led her last retreat during Lent in 2009, with the Holy Spirit powerfully touching the life of one of our Associates in a matter of great forgiveness. Cornelia has and always will touch the lives of the sisters who have been fortunate to know her. Please join us with your presence or in your spirit in honoring this holy, powerful-for-good woman, our Sister Cornelia, OSH.

Faithfully,

The Sisters of St. Helena

PS - Rather than list all our names, please see our most recent community photograph at http://www.osh.org/newsletter/sept_12.pdf.

Sister Cornelia in Grahamstown, South Africa with several Order of The Holy Cross brothers and friends, November 2010

Tribute Wall

RO

“ Among my memories of Cornelia are the visits she would pay to Mount Calvary Monastery in Santa Barbara during East Coast winters. There she loved to soak up the Southern California sunshine in the cactus garden, engaged in nothing more demanding than novels and a bit of needlework for Br. Alan. Of an afternoon, however, she loved to lap swim with me in the outdoor pool of the Montecito YMCA; refreshed by the exercise, we'd repair to the local ice cream parlor for milk shakes before heading back up the mountain.

Roy Parker, OHC - December 01, 2012 at 02:00 PM

JG

“ We were privileged to get to know Sr Cornelia in Liberia, when she was at Bolahun Mission far in the interior (1968-72) and we were teaching at Cuttington College and Divinity School in central Liberia. I made several retreats at Bolahun and Sr Cornelia, as well as Sr Rachel and Sr Mary Michael would always stop off at our house when they were on the way from Bolahun to Maseru, a strenuous eight hour trip on very rough roads, or dirt or mud. It was friendship with Sr Cornelia which let me to become an Associate of St Helena's there at Bolahun. And Sr Cornelia was just as welcoming to us when she was living at Vails Gate and we retired to Boston. Sr Cornelia lived a wonderfully full and rich life in Africa and in the states, and even doing Chinese ministry in New York and going back to teach at OHC in Grahamstown, South Africa. We join you all in mourning her passing, and celebrating the wonderful life of ministry she led -- a gracious example to us all.

Judy and John Gay

Judy Gay - December 01, 2012 at 01:55 PM

JM

“ Sister Cornelia was a wise woman. It was always a delight to spend some time with her when she visited South Africa. She tutored Maths when she was around and I am sure she will be missed by the kids she worked with when she was here. " Lala ngoxolo" Sr. Cornelia " Sijabulela"

Josias Morobi,OHC - November 30, 2012 at 03:12 PM

BO

“ Dear Sisters,
Cornelia was my first spiritual director in December 2001. Her sense of humor (those twinkling eyes!) and her common sense were two features of her direction that unwittingly and easily drew me deeper into God.
Thanks to her, I often remember to say "Good morning, Beloved" first thing in the morning. You are all in my prayers as you grieve your loss and rejoice in her moving deeper into the Love.
Thanks for everything, Cornelia. 'See you.
Love,
Bernard

Br. Bernard Delcourt, OHC - November 30, 2012 at 11:41 AM

RA

“ Sister Cornelia was a dear friend. I will never forget her. When we were in the Bahamas we were very close. I will never forget when I was struggling to learn to drive Sister Cornelia show me how to parallel park
I got my license, thnks to her.
Rest in peace and rise in Glory.

Rafael - November 30, 2012 at 11:21 AM

AM

“ I got to know Sister Cornelia at COROA meetings when I was elected abbot of St. Gregory's Abbey of Three Rivers, MI and she was the superior of OSH at the time. Those years, 1989-1993 were pivotal for COROA developing a much deeper sense of community than we had before, starting with superiors & then in later years extending this to all in leadership positions in the religious orders. Sister Cornelia was a inspirational leader during this time, not by "taking charge," but just by being who she was. Her quiet and deep presence lives on.

Andrew Marr - November 30, 2012 at 11:17 AM

PC

“ A stalwart lady. I'll miss her.

Phillip Christman - November 29, 2012 at 06:42 PM

HK

“ Sister Cornelia came into the life of my family when she and Sister Barbara Lee were stationed in Nassau, Bahamas. Sister Cornelia taught at St. Anne's School where my children attended and worshipped at our home parish at the time, Holy Cross Anglican Church. My oldest daughter Rochelle was one of her students and they became fast friends. Rochelle would go to the Convent on Saturdays for Quiet Time and baking host for the churches. She was among the first to become an Associate of OSH in The Bahamas. I became an Associate years later when my daughter was in college and Sister Cornelia had already left The Bahamas. However, we remained close friends and whenever Sister came to The Bahamas, she stayed with us or with Muriel Sands. After Muriel's passing, she always stayed with us and we considered her part of the family. Needless to say, we are very saddened to learn of her passing but thank God that she came into our lives and enriched us both spiritually and intellectually. We loved her dearly and will miss her but will never forget her. Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis. Amen!

Hilda M. Knowles - November 29, 2012 at 06:05 PM