



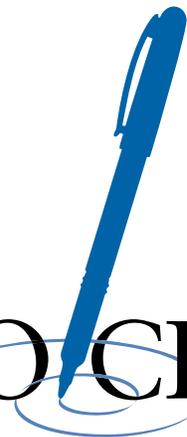
### About the Author

Bud Holland lives in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Annie, and enjoys opportunities to gather with their family (three children and seven grandchildren). Avocations include photography, storytelling, writing, and enjoying music and dancing. He has been ordained for 46 years and has served as a vicar, grant administrator for the Division of Criminal Justice and Judicial Departments (Colorado), rector, member of diocesan staff, and more recently as coordinator of the Office for Ministry Development on the Presiding Bishop's staff. Bud retired in 2009 but he was not ready to stop working. So he joined the staff of the Dialogue Center and works as a consultant, trainer, and coach. Bud is a graduate of Wake Forest University (BA), General Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.M., D.Min.). His areas of special interest and expertise include strategic planning, leadership development, and clergy/lay coaching. He is presently working with several churches in significant transition as a member of the Diocesan Consultation Team and the Diocesan Transition Team of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, and has served as interim in four congregations since retiring from the Episcopal Church Center.

### About Vintage Voice

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# VINTAGE VOICE



## The Unexpected Gifts of Christmas

By the Rev. Melford "Bud" E. Holland, Jr.

When I think of Christmas mornings as a child, I first remember the sounds. My dad would make the trek down to our living room to see if we had been visited overnight. My sister, mother, and I would wait patiently until we heard The Sound. The Sound was a whistle — three times — the signal that the coast was clear. The second we heard it, we came bounding down the stairs to see if we had been gifted. Those were the days when just one or two presents were sufficient. We all rejoiced over our gifts and the room was filled with laughter. The tree, which had been decorated the evening before, glistened and lit up the room in ways that warmed our hearts and lifted our spirits, and brushing against it caused a happy tinkling and clinking of ornaments. After decorating the tree, we would have caught a ride with family and traveled six miles to attend Christmas Eve services, packed in that car like sardines. Laughter on the drive to church and a sleepy silence on the way home. It was a time when there was space to listen, to reflect, to dream.

December has continued to be a deeply meaningful month for me, in ways both happy — my birthday is on the 6th and our oldest son's birthday is on the 15th — and sad — both my parents died in December 1991, Mother on my birthday and Dad just two weeks later. I will always treasure the wonderful Christmas memories they created for my sister and me. I also love Advent, the incredible way it points to the past and future while grounding me in the present moment of anticipation. Who is it that I want to be born in me?

So what might we make of this time of the year? Since my early days in that small village in West Virginia, the Christmas season has continued to reach new heights of commercialism. Advent has often become invisible. The role and function of church has diminished in many of our communities. Yet it seems to me that there is still a yearning to get together and, for many of us, a wish to continue to tell the stories. And there is no greater story than that of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. I still believe that nothing can separate us from that love of God.

One of the great gifts that you and I can enjoy at our time of life is to share stories. It is one way to pass on our legacies to others. I enjoy telling stories to my grandchildren and I think they enjoy hearing them. I hope they will find joy in retelling some of those stories when they have grandchildren of their own, just as I did in hearing such stories when I was a child. Having the opportunity to genuinely connect with others on a personal basis is an unexpected gift in this non-stop, constantly wired world. Such was the case in my home, where storytelling took the place of television, catching up with one another supplanted any tendency to separate, and laughter imbued our hearts with gratefulness. Certainly it was not a perfect place or time, but it was special. In my mind's eye, I still hear the conversation, smell the meals being cooked, and sense the dreams being shared. It was a time of active listening, and valuing others in the conversation. Behind the incredible speed of today is a yearning of many to slow down, gain perspective, and enjoy the moments we have. All of these things can become gifts again for us today, and gifts to share with others who might grace our midst.

Wishing each of you an Advent full of expectation and hope, and a Christmas full of joy and wonder.



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