



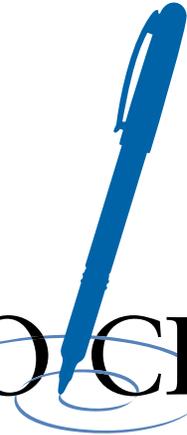
About the Author

The Rev. Mary Anne Dorner is a graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary and was ordained deacon in 1989 and priest in 1991 in the Diocese of Delaware. She has served parishes in the dioceses of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Southwest Florida. Since her retirement in 2006, she has served as an adjunct professor in theology and church history for Barry University, as a volunteer chaplain at Florida Hospital Wesley Chapel, and as guest preacher and celebrant at various local churches. She and her husband, Ted, live in Wesley Chapel, FL. They recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary with their four children, their spouses, and eight grandchildren. Their “retirement hobby” is world travel. Mary Anne also leads a women’s book club and occasional retreats and quiet days. Her spiritual practices include contemplative photography and inspirational writing.

About Vintage Voice

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VINTAGE VOICE



Holidays, Holy Days

By the Rev. Mary Anne Dorner

For many years, my writing consisted of constructing sermons (mostly on Saturdays) for delivery on Sunday mornings in front of a congregation. After retirement, I found that I really missed writing. I discovered that it had been my creative outlet all along. Since I had no desire to write a book, or even magazine articles (secular or religious), I had to find a purpose for wanting to start writing again.

Fortunately for me, a friend suggested that I sign up for a “Writing Your Life Story” class that was being offered to seniors through our local university. I found it easy to write and share stories about my childhood, where I grew up, and my family. But when we were asked to write a story about our favorite holiday, I drew a blank.

How could that be? As I thought about it, I realized that, during more than 30 years as a priest, others’ holidays have been my holy days. And they always have been work days for me, too. I thought back on my experience of parish ministry and how my way of preparing for and spending the holidays was so different for me than for most of my family, friends, and neighbors.

For instance, while others were getting ready for Halloween, I would be preparing for All Saints’ Sunday — the time in the church year when we remember all those who have gone before us in faith, from those “official saints” on the church calendar to our loved ones who have passed on to eternal life. The theme song for this time of year is “For all the saints, who from their labors rest,” and that was true for everyone but the clergy on that day!

The next holiday — Thanksgiving — meant getting ready for the festive holiday meal complete with turkey, stuffing, and all the wonderful sides and pies and other goodies... and for Thanksgiving services. The night before Thanksgiving always featured a local ecumenical/interfaith service, a command performance for Episcopal priests. After all, our church was viewed as being open to all faiths, and to shun that public ecumenical event would have been seen as very politically incorrect. Then, on Thanksgiving morning, it was always a very early morning “wake-up call” to get the turkey ready for the oven before having to dash off to services at whichever

Episcopal parish I was currently serving. Thank goodness, I loved the traditional Thanksgiving hymns such as “Come ye thankful people, come.”

Next up was Advent — that time of year when the church and its clergy would try to get people to focus on preparing for the coming of Christ at Christmas with songs such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” But the malls were already celebrating Christmas by playing Christmas carols so that folks would buy more presents. And television shows were focused on “Charlie Brown’s Christmas” rather than a longing for the Savior to come into our world.

Super Bowl Sunday became “Souper Bowl Sunday” for churches. While others looked forward to gorging themselves on chips and dip and nachos and cheese and all kinds of carbs, washed down with beers or soda, we would have soup pots ready to collect money for the poor and the hungry.

Valentine’s Day — the holiday focused on sentimental cards and romantic love and boxes of chocolate — usually falls around the beginning of Lent, the church season that starts with Ash Wednesday, when we focus on the thought that we are dust and to dust we shall return. On that day, we sing the hymn, “Forty Days and Forty Nights” and ask the Lord, “Should not we thy sorrow share and from worldly joys abstain?” So much for chocolates!

Finally — Easter! That glorious Sunday when we celebrate Christ’s resurrection from the dead... which is often overshadowed by Easter egg hunts. I remember one church I served in which two groups had volunteered to “run” the Easter egg hunt: the youth group and the women’s group. The knives were out just as we were entering Holy Week. On the Saturday before Palm Sunday, I held an emergency “Easter Egg Summit” at which I got the two groups to agree that they could both work on the egg hunt; the youth group would be in charge of the younger kids and the ladies would handle the older kids... in two separate places. Oh, joy! I sang “Welcome, Happy Morning” on Easter with extra vigor, having averted a major parish crisis.

And what could be controversial about Memorial Day? Well, there are two camps in many churches about displaying the American flag. Some folks believe that it belongs right up on the altar, and others believe in a bit more separation of church and state. I served one church whose pastor felt strongly about separation of church and state. When he removed the American flag from its spot next to the altar, it caused a big split in the congregation and many families left. United we were not.

So for me, holidays and holy days have a checkered history. As a pastor, I felt like I was always trying to walk a fine line between ideology (keeping holy days pure of secularization) and reality (kids really do want to see Santa Claus before Christmas). “Keeping Christ in Christmas” isn’t easy even in church, and the Easter egg hunts are still a big draw to get people to church.

Given all those pre-retirement memories, it is no wonder that when people ask me today what my favorite holiday is, I usually tell them it’s just an ordinary day when I can get together with family and friends and relax and have fun without having to worry about balancing church and secular expectations. Amen!



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