

Beyond The
Red Door



SHRINE MONT, A HOLY PLACE AND SO CLOSE

By E. Ray Walker

Shrine Mont, that holy mountain a mere 68 miles from idyllic Culpeper, beckons.

Whether you seek spiritual renewal, quiet meditation or even a memorable mountain hike, Shrine Mont has it all. And much more.

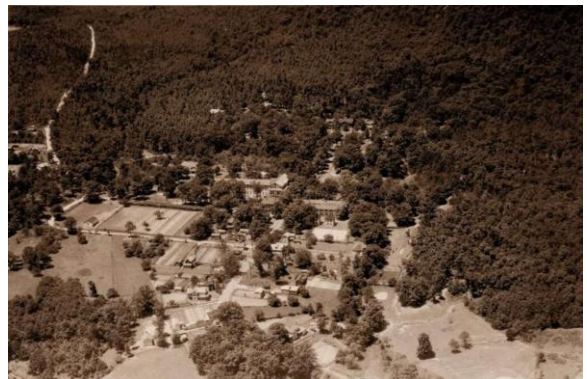
“Shrine Mont is a magical place!” raves Lydia Hansen of St. Stephen’s.

Magical, yes. And spiritual. And fun for all. Let’s take a look.

What is Shrine Mont?

Owned by the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, Shrine Mont — “holy mountain” or “holy hill” — is a retreat and conference center near the village of Orkney Springs, Va., in the Shenandoah Valley. The diocesan offices are in Richmond, of course, but Shrine Mont’s cathedral is the principal church of the diocese.

With accommodations for up to 550 people, Shrine Mont offers groups and individuals fun things to do, beautiful places to explore and abundant hospitality.



The iconic Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration has public services on Sundays from late April through the second Sunday in November.

Southern homestyle cooking, served in abundance, is a hallmark of Shrine Mont's gracious hospitality. A bell rings to announce meals served cafeteria style in the Virginia House Dining Room or family style in Tucker Hall.

Dining reservations must be made at least 48 hours in advance.

From workshops, conferences, retreats and music festivals to family reunions, family vacations and summer youth camps, Shrine Mont is a great destination year 'round.

The property is on the edge of the George Washington National Forest and encompasses 1,100 acres, mostly forest. The site is part of the Appalachian chain of the Allegheny Mountains.



HEART AND SOUL OF SHRINE MONT

The heart of the property is the Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration, an open-air cathedral consecrated on August 6, 1925. (Yes, the Shrine will celebrate its 100th birthday this summer.) Each of its stones was pulled by horse or rolled by local people from the mountain that embraces it. The Shrine is the site of regular worship and is available for groups and conferences for worship.

The cathedral was built in a natural amphitheater. It comprises a bell tower, a sacristy, a shrine crossing, choir and clergy stalls, a pulpit, a baptismal font (originally a dugout stone used by Native Americans to grind corn), and a lectern. At the consecration in 1925, a Deed of Donation was presented by the site's owners conveying the land to the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.

Shrine Mont is known for many things, and the cathedral boasts having the highest ceiling in the world — reaching all the way up to heaven.

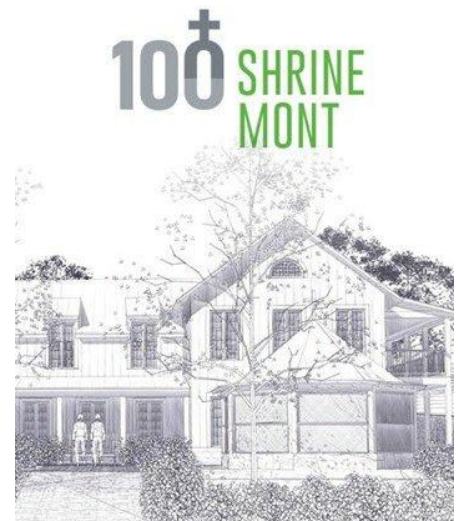
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

On Thursday, August 6, 1925. Bishop William Cabell Brown consecrated the Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration as the cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.

A Thursday? In the middle of a workweek???

Historians will recall that was the day the Dallas Hilton, the first hotel to bear the Hilton name, opened. Little did those in Dallas know they were being upstaged in cultural significance by a tiny church in rural Virginia.

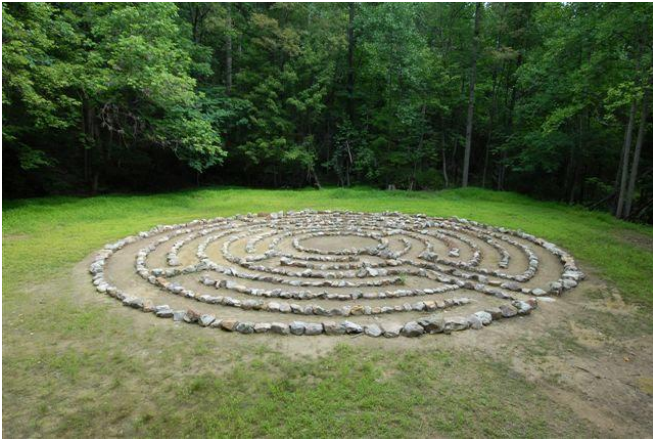
In the coming months, Shrine Mont will mark its centennial with several events across the diocese and at Shrine Mont.



100⁺ SHRINE MONT

On August 6, the Rt. Rev. Mark Stevenson, the president and chairman of Shrine Mont and bishop of the diocese, and special guest the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, a former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, will celebrate the 100th anniversary with a service at the cathedral, starting at 4:30 p.m.

At St. Stephen's, the Vestry has agreed to contribute to the Shrine Mont Celebration and Capital Campaign. More information on this diocesan wide campaign soon.



A PATH FOR MEDITATION

The Shrine Mont Labyrinth is a meandering path for prayer and meditation, with one entrance and a single route that winds in a circular pattern to the center. From the labyrinth's center point, the same path will take you out again.

A labyrinth symbolizes a journey inward to find wholeness and then outward back into the world, often associated with spiritual growth and transformation. It's a metaphor for life itself, with its

twists and turns, and the continuous process of experiencing and learning through various stages.

The Shrine Mont labyrinth is patterned after the labyrinth in the famous Chartres Cathedral in France.

The white, flat, triangular stone at the entry, called the Entry Stone, is carved from marble from the sacred Isle of Iona in Scotland. The labyrinth was constructed by volunteers in March 2009 using native stones.

Labyrinths date back thousands of years and are not limited to any single culture or religious tradition.

Labyrinths are not mazes meant to confuse, but rather pathways to guide and inspire contemplation and reflection.

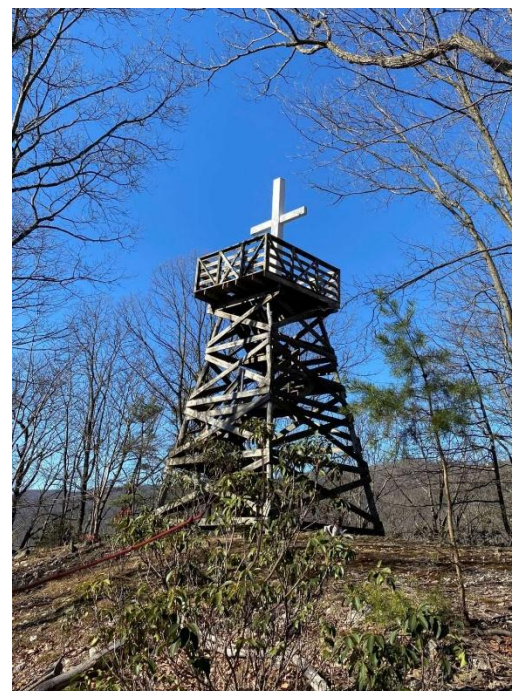
STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

There are several popular hiking trails on the property, including the Ridge Trail up to The Cross on Spring Mountain. The most scenic section is the North Mountain Trail that climbs Great North Mountain. Passing a large cliff structure, the trail ends at North Mountain Rocks with spectacular views.

The Cross is a cross-topped observation tower on the south ridge of Spring Mountain. This landmark — blending faith, history and natural beauty — has amazing views of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the east and the Great North Mountain to the west.

Several memorable hikes can be put together using the many trails.

In addition to hiking, other fun activities await such as pickleball, yoga, tennis and swimming.



IMPORTANT NOTE: Pets are not permitted on Shrine Mont property.

WHAT IS A 'RETREAT'?

Shrine Mont is a “retreat and conference center.” So, what is a “retreat”?

The church says it is a period of time, in a “place apart” from daily life and work, which normally includes silence, reflection and may include some form of still, meditative prayer that may be combined with brief periods of activity and study. Retreats often focus on particular themes of the church year. Retreats may be communal, though they can also be individual and undirected or unstructured.

The concept of retreat has its roots in the scriptural injunction to withdraw to a quiet, lonely place as Christ did periodically.

The practice of making retreats is also based in the monastic tradition of structured time for silence and contemplation to balance the spiritual life between the contemplative way of life and the active way of life.



PRAISES FROM ST. STEPHEN'S

Longtime St. Stephen's parishioners gush about their Shrine Mont experiences.

Mary Ann Cowherd: “The first time I went, my parents sent me as a getaway at Family Conference. I took our 3- and 5-year-old. They took care of the 1-year twins! (Brave)

“Everyone kept telling me, ‘Just let the children go!’

“They were too little for that, but it's a very safe space. No locks on doors, no telephone or cell reception, (it's better now) simple rooms, delicious food, and plenty of it.

“I've attended many conferences when I was active in Christian Education. We do a family reunion, reserving a cottage every Labor Day and my official vacation with no cooking or cleaning. You should definitely visit.

“Our kids all attended camps for many years and one finished up as a counselor. They all are active church members now, and I believe it was as much Shrine Mont influence as parent/church.

“They lived a special life ‘on the mountain’ and certainly brought that back home. There is so much to do: hiking to the Cross or up North Mountain, a huge pool, tennis courts and labyrinth.”

Lydia Hansen: “Until our attendance at last summer's retreat, (husband) Brad and I had never personally stayed there. We have, however, been to the camp many times with our children for their summer camps. Our youngest, in particular, attended the summer music and art camps as well as the weeklong “Parent Trap”-style camp with cabins, bugs and hiking.

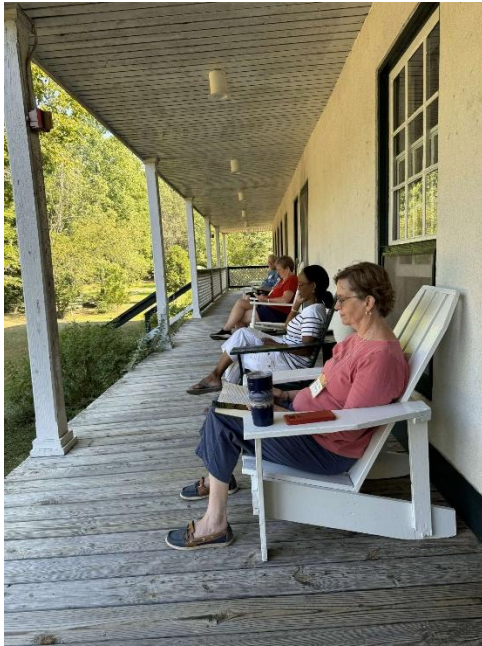
“Since Brad and I had such an amazing time at last year's retreat, we are definitely attending this year's. We are both happiest when outside, and the beauty of mountains is intoxicating. We also love the history of the camp with the old-style buildings and all those porches with rocking chairs!

“My favorite part of Shrine Mont is that it contains Virginia’s Episcopal Cathedral. The fact that our cathedral is outside, enclosed by nature, speaks to the church’s appreciation of God’s creations and, in turn, our reflection to construct and maintain such a beautiful place to worship Him. The service (Father) Trent (Moore) conducted at the end of last year’s retreat was the highlight for us, and we’re thrilled to do it again in July.

“We also loved being with others from St .Stephen’s and other churches. We made new friends who will hopefully be there again in July. From the musical jam sessions at night to the prayer time, alone time, crafts, hiking and games, it is a wonderful way to spend our precious time together.”



Julie Yowell: “I would love to say that I have lots of experience with Shrine Mont, but, alas, I have only been one time. :-)



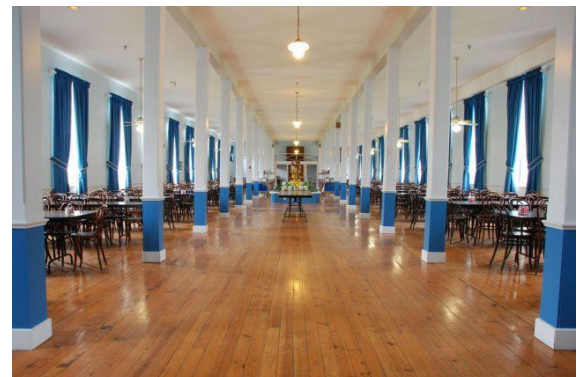
“The one trip there, though, was wonderful ... below are a few of my favorite things:

1. Food, fellowship at meals and delicious food.
2. Walking the beautiful and peaceful labyrinth.
3. The Cathedral Shrine is both beautiful and spiritual. ... The history on its origin is a wonderful story of the people on the mountain, investing time, energy and love to create a very special worship cathedral.
4. The evening bonfire was a really fun time, with the children and singing, and S’mores.
5. Wear good hiking shoes. The hike to the top of the mountain is long, but worth the views.”

CAN YOU SAY ‘BUTT BUN’ HERE?

An aside from Lydia Hansen: “Strangely enough, the most mentioned and remembered aspect of those summer camps was butt buns from the cafeteria. They were a commodity for the campers, and I’m pretty sure I heard a story of a camper trading three butt buns for a cabin fan.

With the summer heat, that was a pretty significant trade. Brad and I were instructed to bring a butt bun back home with us from the retreat last year, but it was considered inadequate and not at all what a butt bun used to be.”



FYI: Butt bun is a type of roll made in the cafeteria. Shrine Mont is famous for them.



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Much about Shrine Mont has been praised, justifiably. Still, according to visitors, there are a few areas that could be improved.

For example, Lydia Hansen says, “OK, if I didn’t say the lack of air conditioning is daunting, I would be horribly remiss. Being a Mississippi native, I know heat!

It is bearable, but it does make you appreciate your thermostat at home. Knowing that the buildings at Shrine Mont are historic helps somewhat, but you should be aware.”

Also ...

“Although Brad and I stayed in one of the handicap hotel rooms on the campus, the threshold of the room was impossible to navigate in a wheelchair. Please note that most of the buildings are accessible, and we had no issues with the cafeteria and other meeting places. The issue with getting over a high door threshold is one we encounter often and is one of the motivators for us to raise \$\$\$ for accessible equipment. We’re bringing a portable threshold ramp for wheelchairs to Shrine Mont this year and gifting it to the hotel. Now, anytime a handicap room is rented, the staff can give the ramp to the guest when they get the room key. There are also a few areas around the pond that could use some ramps, or at least fewer stairs. All it takes is to notice and then supply a way to make it better.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Website: www.shrinemont.com