

The Miracle of Helfta

The Convent of Helfta: Past, Present, Future

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*“I will forever sing
of your gracious deeds, O Lord” (Ps. 89)*

WHERE IS THE CONVENT OF HELFTA?

*“How will one know where he is going
if he knows not whence he comes”*
(Wurzburg Synod)

1 Convent of Helfta, the “crown and pearl” of all the convents of medieval Germany! But where is it, and how do we get there? Let’s choose Hanover as a starting point and head in the direction of Berlin. When we reach Magdeburg we proceed south for 80 kilometers into the Mansfeld area, which is today a district in the State of Saxony-Anhalt. There we find the town of Eisleben. We drive through it in the direction of Halle and come to a site on the edge of town with old and new buildings. On the road ahead we see a large construction sign with a sketch of planned buildings and the words, “Helfta Convent reconstruction has begun. Here the Association of Friends is rebuilding the Convent of Helfta with the support of the Diocese of Magdeburg.” If we were to take that sign down we would find another with the name, “The Convent of St. Mary of Helfta”.

2 The Convent of Helfta is located in the Diocese of Magdeburg, which, with its 23,208 square kilometers, is, in terms of area, the fourth largest diocese in Germany. Of the 2.7 million inhabitants of the State of Saxony-Anhalt only about 190,000 are Catholic and 450,000 Protestant. Bishop Leo Nowack of Magdeburg prefers to call it a mission diocese rather than a “diaspora” diocese. The new states of the Federal Republic of Germany,

which once made up the former communist German Democratic Republic, constitute that land whose population has the greatest percentage of unbelievers in the world. In this region about 1.7 million inhabitants, 80% of the total, do not belong to any faith community.

3 How can a convent which has been dead for 460 years rise again in the middle of a Protestant land, indeed in Eisleben, where the reformer, Martin Luther, was born and died? Let's take a brief look at the history of this convent.

ORIGIN

"In the beginning there was a dream"
(Burchard of Mansfeld)

4 It was the first quarter of the 13th Century. In Castle Manfred, not far from Eisleben, a wedding was celebrated in the presence of the Staufan Emperor Fredrick II. Count Burchard of Mansfeld brought Elisabeth, the daughter of Lord Heinrich of Schwartzenberg, to his court to be his wife. Count von Mansfeld was influential, prosperous and devout. But while two daughters, Gertrude and Sophia, were born to the couple, the marriage was denied a male heir.

5 One night Count Burchard had a dream. God admonished him to do something more for his soul with his great riches and to found a nuns' convent in honor of the Mother of God. The count and his wife interpreted this as a divine sign and acted accordingly. As the chronicle reports: "Without hesitation, very concerned for the salvation of his soul, the count took care to act on this admonition. In the 6,483rd year after the creation of the world, in the 1229th year after the birth of Christ, on Thursday of Easter week, with the help of divine grace, with pure intention for the praise of God and the honor of the glorious Virgin Mother of God, Mary, and for the salvation of his soul, so that through the intercession of the Mother of Mercy he might never be separated from God, this illustrious count, Lord Borghard of Mansvelt, of blessed memory, began the construction of a nuns' convent near Castle Mansvelt. He adopted this convent in place of a son, as no actual son had been granted him.

6 Already in the same year, 1229, on the 29th of June, the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the first seven Cistercian nuns, under Abbess Cunigunda of Halberstadt, moved out of the local convent of St. James and St. Burchard, and into the new Cistercian establishment (June 3rd, 1258, was taken as the date of the foundation). The pious count was called home by God on December 13th of the same year, 1229. The countess Elisabeth had been named the spiritual overseer of the convent. And after the death of her husband, prompted by the noise and roughness of the men of the castle, and

in particular by the disturbances and unrest of the area, she moved the religious community to a place called Rodersdorf northwest of Eisleben. (It no longer exists, nor can its former location be identified.) She herself moved there and ended her days devoutly in silence and prayer in 1240. She had transferred the patronage of the convent to her daughters' husbands, Counts Hermann and Burchard of Querfurt.

HISTORY

“Porta patet, Cor magis.”

“The door stands open, the heart still more”

(Saying of the Cistercian Order)

7 The nineteen-year-old Sister Gertrude of Hackeborn was unanimously chosen as the successor of the first abbess, Cunigunda of Halberstadt. Gertrude headed the convent for forty years and eleven days with prudence, energy and intelligence.

8 But because there was too little water in Rodersdorf the convent was moved again in 1258 to a town with many lakes, Helfta near Eisleben, a country seat of the Hackeborns. Abbess Gertrude of Hackeborn asked her family to donate some farmland on which to build a convent.

9 On June 3rd, 1258, Trinity Sunday, the convent was dedicated in the presence of Count von Mansfeld and Count Querfurt and Bishop Volrad of Halberstadt. The brothers of the two Sisters Gertrude and Mechtilda, Albrecht and Ludwig of Hackeborn, vigorously supported the new convent. Many members of the noble families received their education in the convent school. By 1262 the convent had grown so large that it was possible to establish a daughter-foundation in Hedersleben. At times the convent reportedly housed over a hundred nuns. Already by 1290 the Convent of Helfta had approximately sixty choir nuns.

10 The Abbess Gertrude of Hackeborn promoted intellectual and spiritual education according to the principle: if the zeal for knowledge is lost, the nurture of religion will cease, for the scriptures will no longer be understood.

11 At the present time it cannot be clearly determined to which order the convent belonged. On the one hand, Cistercian nuns following the Cistercian rule moved into the convent, which points to a Cistercian identity. On the other hand, the convent was not integrated into the Cistercian Order because the Cistercian general chapter of 1228 did not permit incorporation. Hence those concerned with the spiritual care of the sisters had to seek out other orders, among which the Dominicans are mentioned. This greater independence led to many outside connections and a broader range of opportunities for development. Thus began what came to be called the “Helfta School for Women Theologians”.

12 The convent remained in Helfta for about ninety-five years and, under the leadership of Abbess Gertrude, enjoyed a “golden age”, a great spiritual, literary and religious flowering.

13 “Scholarship and mysticism” marked the lives of many intellectually distinguished nuns, among whom three especially helped determine the history of mysticism in the Catholic Church:

- Mechthild of Magdeburg: she lived as a postulant and a nun in Helfta from about 1207/1210 to 1282/1294, the exact dates being unknown. She is the authoress of the book, written in German, “Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit” [“The Flowing Light of Divinity”].
- Mechthild of Hackeborn: She was the blood sister of Abbess Gertrude and lived from 1241 to 1299. She wrote a book in latin “Liber Specialis Gratiae” [“The book of Special Grace”].
- Gertrude of Helfta, called “The Great”: She lived in Helfta from 1256 to 1302. Her descent is unknown. She wrote two books in latin “Legatus Divinae Pietatis”, [“Messenger of Divine Love”] and “Exercitia”, [“Spiritual Exercises”].

DECLINE

*“See how our Holy Place,
our beauty, our glory, is now laid waste...”*
(1 Maccabees, 2:12)

14 Unfortunately by 1342 the convent was destroyed by Albrecht of Braunschweig because he was denied papal recognition as bishop of Halberstadt. As Albrecht himself put the torch to the structure, his soldiers stormed the cloister and destroyed everything that fell into their hands. It is also probable that a part of the collection of the convent library was destroyed. Given the level of education of the sisters the library must have been extensive, and given that everything was hand-written, its holdings would have been very valuable for that time. The convent community lost “Old Helfta” and in the years 1343-1346 moved into “New Helfta” safe within the shadow of the city walls of Eisleben. There, Count Burchard IV of Mansfeld had the fourth convent built on a piece of land he donated.

15 The nuns were able to live in peace in New Helfta until 1525. Then, driven away by rebellious peasants, they once again had to give up their home. Only after a four-year long detour in Halle and Maehren did some of the nuns return with their abbess, Katharina of Watzdorf, to Old Helfta, which Count Hoyer had rebuilt.

16 However, this place, too, proved to be no lasting home. The Reformation had begun in 1517 with Martin Luther, and it gradually turned the Mansfeld area into “Luther’s land” and in 1542 it forced the introduction of the

Protestant liturgy, the “Martin mass”. All efforts had failed to convert the faithful women under the last abbess, Walburga Reubers, to Protestantism, and the convent was dissolved in 1546 under the Protestant convert, Count Georg of Mansfeld-Eisleben. The nuns departed. The last documentary mention of the convent bears the date, June 19th, 1542.

SECULARIZATION

“No one can burn up the truth”
(Mechthild of Magdeburg)

17 After the death of the last abbess, Walburga Reubers, the convent was secularized by Count Hans Georg of Mansfeld-Eisleben. Being in debt, the count sold the convent lands and buildings to Franz von Kerssenbrock, a Westphalian noble, for 34,000 gold guilders. In 1641 his granddaughter bequeathed the property to her husband, the Swedish major general, Adam von Pfuel. In 1721 King Fredrick Wilhelm I of Prussia bought it back and turned it into a royal domain. It would remain a state property for a long time, even after the dissolution of Prussia in 1918.

18 Political eras came and went: absolutism, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Restoration, the German Empire, the First World War (1914-1918), the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime (1933-1945), the Second World War (1939-1945), and two German states, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany - 1945-1990) and the Federal Republic of Germany.

19 In 1865, during the Restoration period, a first small Catholic Church was opened in Eisleben. In 1868 the Catholic parish of Eisleben acquired the former convent of New Helfta and built the present Catholic parish church of St. Gertrude on that spot. In the period from 1869 to 1875 the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration from Osnabruck attempted to revive the convent. This effort failed, however, because of Bismark’s “Kulturkampf”.

20 In 1945, with the division of Germany into two states and the communist take-over of the east, yet another era began. Helfta, a state domain, became a “publicly owned concern” [“Volkseigenen Betrieb” or “VEG”] of the German Democratic Republic. New buildings were constructed for this large agricultural operation: stalls, storerooms, etc. What was left of the convent buildings fell into ever greater decay. Garages were built in the ruins of the church, the “holiest place”. Believers were barred from visiting what was once such an important Christian site. A later report said: “Helfta is a scrapheap. Ruined buildings must also be allowed to die. There is no hope for efforts to preserve them.” In spite of everything the choir of the convent church, with its three Romanesque windows, as well as other sections of the wall of the once sizeable structure survived the ages.

LEGENDS AND STORIES

*“As though, after centuries, the fragrance of the saints,
of their prayers and lives, were still present”*

(Joseph Hochenauer)

21 A legend runs as follows. The east façade of the choir of the former convent church, St. Mary of Helfta, is still preserved. This façade is interrupted by the three towering Romanesque windows through which the morning light once streamed into the church. These windows served as images of the Holy Trinity. As the convent was left to decay, and fell ever more into disrepair, these windows were walled in to the very top.

22 Strangely, the stones in the left window would not stay in place. They broke free and made an opening for the light. Attempts to wall up the window failed. The stones and mortar did not hold. This problem continued into our own times, when, finally, the window was boarded up. The inhabitants of the neighboring village of Helfta say that, according to a legend, it was through this very window, in St. Gertrude’s day, that Christ entered the convent church to show himself to her and speak with her. Also the belief has persisted in the town down through the centuries that the history of the convent had not yet ended. “The overflowing light of divinity” would once again reach human hearts in this holy place.

23 In spite of the German Democratic Republic’s prohibition against visits, pilgrims crossed the forbidden border clandestinely and made their way to Helfta. A worker employed in the state-run agricultural operation related such an experience from his childhood. According to his account his way to school took him through the meadows and past the ruins of the convent church. On a dark winter morning he was startled by a crouched figure. Coming closer he saw that it was a nun kneeling on the ground. The townspeople said that a nun from Peru had undertaken a pilgrimage to visit the spot where the holy sisters of Helfta had received their divine revelations.

24 In 1970 a Spanish religious turned up who, unable to speak German, knew only how to say the one word “Helfta” to the Catholic pastor of Eisleben, Fr. Hubner. The religious made his request in Latin to be allowed to visit the convent grounds. Fr. Hubner succeeded in getting him to the “forbidden territory”. In front of the ruins of the church the pilgrim threw himself to the ground and sank deeply into silent prayer. Moved, he took a few steps over the soil where once the medieval nuns had walked and broke a piece of stone from the wall and took it with him as a precious relic. With difficulty Fr. Hubner managed to get the Spanish guest past the East German authorities and back into the Federal Republic without a stir. In the stretch between Hanover and Berlin he had interrupted his trip to Magdeburg without permission and gone looking for Helfta. Thus pilgrims, principally

from Spain, Portugal and South America, where St. Gertrude is much revered, came to honor the memory of the saint. Little was known of the three holy women here in their homeland, Germany. But they came to be known and cherished on the Iberian peninsula mainly through St. Theresa of Avila. The holy Carmelite called Gertrude “the holy German virgin”. Because of this Spanish influence Gertrude was chosen as the patroness of the West Indies.

CHANGE

“Then at the end of the century God himself acted”
(Joseph Hockenauer)

25 Then came the change! Was it a conscious plan? Many things came together:

- the election of a Polish pope in 1978,
- the rise of the Solidarity Union in Poland in 1980,
- the government of General Secretary and later President Mikhail Gorbachev in Russia in 1985, and the grassroots pressure in the German Democratic Republic in 1989.

26 Great was the courage of these peaceful demonstrators. On October 9th, 1989, 70,000 went into the streets of Leipzig. Here as in other cities, despite the threats of the authorities, the non-violent revolution began in the churches. The Magdeburg Cathedral also became a starting point for the revolution “with feet”, the revolution whose cry was “We are the people.” This was the church of Kaiser Otto the Great, who together with his father, King Heinrich I, united into one land and people what from then into modern times came to be called Germany.

27 U.S. President George Bush, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, former Chancellor Willi Brandt, as well as other political figures took advantage of the “kairos”, the favorable moment, the open moment of world history.

28 On the 9th of November 1989 the wall, the “iron curtain”, fell. On October 3rd, 1990 Germany was reunited in peace and freedom.

29 The political change also brought free access to the former convent lands of Helfta. On closely inspecting the property, the faithful were shocked at the extent of the devastation, and at the same time touched by an “atmosphere of prayer” that had survived the ages, “as though the fragrance of the saints, of their prayers and lives, were still present.” The conviction grew that this holy place should not be lost to Christianity. The “kairos” for the resurrection of Helfta was at hand.

ORGANIZATIONS

“Visions whose time is ripe have great power”
(Joseph Hochenauer)

30 On October 16th, 1990 the pastor of Hettstedt, a city thirty kilometers north of Eisleben, Fr. Horst Mittenentzwei, founded the society, “Friends of the Convent of Helfta, (e.V. Hettstedt)”, [“e.V. Hettstedt” = registered organization of Hettstedt] whose purpose was to acquire the convent property and put it to some religious use.

31 A teacher from Hettstedt, Joachim Herrmann, who was involved in the preservation of old monuments, was able halt the plan to blow up the Helfta convent ruins in 1988. On April 16th, 1991 he founded the curatorial society, “The Convent of Helfta (e.V.)”, in order to preserve the cultural heritage the site represented. Associations from Eisleben and the surrounding area joined him in an effort to preserve for posterity the parts of the former convent that still remained.

32 Also the parish of St. Gertrude in Eisleben under their pastor, Fr. Dieter Tautz, became comrades-in-arms for the renovation of Helfta. In addition to these three groups there arose in the western Federal States, as a result of the city partnership, Voehringen/Iller-Hettstedt, a movement under the leadership of Fr. Joseph Hochenauer.

33 On February 24th, 1992 he founded the “Circle for the Convent of Helfta Initiative (e.V. Kammlach, Bavaria)” whose goal was the construction of a new Catholic convent in Helfta.

34 On the 16th and 17th of September, 1992, by agreement with Bishop Leo Nowack of Magdeburg these four groups joined together to form an umbrella organization called “Association of the Friends of the Convent of Helfta (e.V.)”, and established its headquarters in Eisleben. The aim of the organization was to return Helfta to ecclesiastical ownership, and re-establish it as a center of Christian life. The Association wanted to save the Christian legacy of the three holy women and develop it for the contemporary world. The organization took as its logo the old convent seal with the words, “The proclamation of the Lord”, which refer to the incarnation of God. Money was raised under the motto, “Make room for the light.” Funds came from all over Germany. On December 1st, 1992 the State of Saxony-Anhalt leased the fourteen acre convent lands for ten years to the Diocese of Magdeburg, which, in turn, handed the property over to the Friends’ Association. In March of 1993 negotiations began with the Berlin trusteeship which administered the land holdings of the former German Democratic Republic. On August 8th, 1994, after many difficulties, and through the mediation of the Bavarian finance minister, Dr. Theo Waigel, the Diocese of Magdeburg took ownership of Helfta for the sum of 1,391,622 German marks.

35 Then the idea to re-found a convent surfaced. As Bishop Nowack expressed it, “I expect that every effort will be made to establish a community of sisters in Helfta.” In 1993 a relationship arose with the Cistercian community of Seligenthal near Landshut in Bavaria.

36 The abbess, Gertrude Assumpta Schenkl, whose term of office would end with her seventy-fifth birthday in 1999, declared herself ready to start a community of sisters in 1999 or thereafter if a convent building and a church could be built by that time.

37 On August 13th, 1999 the first eight sisters from Seligenthal moved into Helfta, and on the feast of the Assumption, under the leadership of Abbess Assumpta, the priory of St. Mary of Helfta was founded.

38 In 1996 a “Golden Book of Helfta” was compiled. This book documented the important support that the project of the reconstruction received. It tells of the broad base of patrons, small and large, from the Church in Germany and throughout the world. The great benefactor supporting the purchase of the old convent grounds, Federal Finance Minister Theo Waigel, wrote, “With deep gratitude for the Convent of Helfta, I think of the years of the project’s development. My fond wish is for this work to become a cell of the Christian message and hope in eastern Germany. The day of German unification, March 10th, 2000, Theodor Waigel.”

RECONSTRUCTION

“The desert of unbelief cries out for oases”
(Josef Hochenauer)

39 The church was consecrated on June 3rd, 1258. On the 734th anniversary of the convent’s foundation, June 3rd, 1992, Fr. Dieter Tautz celebrated Eucharist in the church ruins for the first time since the Reformation. Then the work began. Bishop Leo Nowack of Magdeburg assumed supervision of the reconstruction which was financed exclusively through donations. The first step was clearing out the old convent church. On June 7th, 1997 the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Nowack in the church ruins.

40 In his address the bishop said: “This country needs intellectual and spiritual stimuli if it is not to dry up! It needs oases of the love of God and of love for humankind. We can be sure that through the intercession of the Mother of God and of the holy women of Helfta we are being led along a good path. God bless the work that was begun today”.

41 On the 21st of August 1998, the year of the 700th Jubilee of the Cistercians, the building plaque was unveiled in the presence of Bishop Nowack and Abbess Assumpta Schenkl. This day marked the official beginning of the construction of the first section of the building. This section

was completed just fourteen months later. The twelve million marks required for this project came entirely from donations.

42 The church ruins were restored in a way that made use of all the medieval remnants. A center for Catholic life was planned around this abbey church of St. Mary's. First, the house of the feudal lord was expanded into an "assembly and education center". The "Joseph Chapel" made possible the resumption of Eucharistic celebrations in 1994.

43 On September 22nd, 1994 the sanctuary lamp was re-lit. In the "storage building" a museum and a small mass chapel were set up. The "new sheep barn" was transformed into a meeting hall. Later the convent building was constructed as an extension of the church, and a convent guest house was built, "The House of Human Dignity". The way of the cross, of which there remained no medieval remnants, had to be entirely built from scratch. With this construction the first buildings for the convent of St. Mary of Helfta were completed.

DEDICATION

*"The Convent of Helfta lives!
One day in the adventure of God!"*
(Josef Hochenauer)

44 On November 21st, 1999, the Feast of Christ the King, 770 years after the foundation of the first convent, 757 years after its destruction in the year 1342, 457 years after its forced dissolution in 1642, on the 700th anniversary of the death of St. Mechthild of Hackeborn, in time for the Holy Year, 2000, Bishop Leo Nowack of Magdeburg dedicated the convent church of St. Mary of Helfta in a pontifical high mass. The large space of the church which once held ninety choir nuns was far too small for the many visitors. In a nearby tent the celebration was transmitted onto a large video screen. Was it a thousand, or two thousand or more participants?

45 The importance of this moment was underscored by the participation of public figures: retired Bishop Johannes Braun, Suffragan Bishop Gerhard Feige from the Diocese of Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt's Minister-president Reinhard Hoenner, and representing the Cistercian order, Abbot General Maurus Evesta from Rome and the Trappist abbot from the motherhouse, Citeaux, Olivier Querandel, the Lutheran representative, Probst Waldemar Schewe from Halle-Naumburg, Mayor Peter Pfuentner of Eisleben, and many others. The first seven Cistercian sisters from the Cistercian house, Seligenthal, accompanied Abbess Assumpta Schenkl into the church. And, of course, also present were the "new founders" of Helfta, Josef Hochenauer, Horst Mittenentzwei, and Dieter Tautz. As mentioned, Bishop Nowack of Magdeburg presided at the pontifical high mass of dedication. Standing at his

side as concelebrants were Abbot General Maurus Evesta and Trappist Abbot Olivier Querandel.

- 46** The following are just a few of the high points of the dedication mass:
1. The handing over of the keys. Architect Michael Mass handed over the keys of the new convent of Helfta to Abbess Assumpta Schenkl. The Abbess responded: “Keys are for locking, but also unlocking. Here they are for opening. The door stands open and so do our hearts.”
 2. The readings. The three readings for the Liturgy of the Word were taken from the following scripture passages:
 - First reading: Esra 1,1-11. King Cyrus has the temple in Jerusalem rebuilt.
 - Second reading: Ephesians 2,11-22. “You are no longer strangers but citizens and members of the household of God.”
 - Gospel: Luke 19:1-10. The tax collector, Zacchaeus, receives Jesus into his house.
 3. The Homily. In his homily on the readings Bishop Novack explained that this house needs to be rebuilt like the temple in Jerusalem. God works wonders in this land. To what purpose this expense?
- 47** Everyone needs a place to live. God lives among us. Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus. The sisters, too, hope to create curiosity about Christ.

THE ALTAR AND THE RELICS

48 “The table of the supper” is made out of quarry stones which, as a sign of ecumenism, come from Catholic and Evangelical parishes of the Deanery of Eisleben and other communities. A relic of St. Hedwig of Silesia was sealed into it.

49 The relic reminds us that, along with Christ, the saints are also present. Whenever Christ comes he appears in “splendoribus sanctorum”, in “the splendor of the saints”. Great conflicts and animosities have arisen among the neighboring states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany throughout history. But St. Hedwig is honored by each of these three peoples.

THE HELFTA CENTER

“His banner above us is love”
(The Song of Songs and the foundation stone of Helfta)

50 The “Association of the Friends of the Convent of Helfta” which had set as its goal the restoration of the former convent decided on January 14th, 2000 to dissolve itself. It had achieved its main purpose and on the 30th of March 2000 was able to turn over to the Diocese of Magdeburg and the Cistercian

sisters the property that been entrusted to it. It passed into the hands of the newly founded “St. Mary of Helfta Convent Management, Inc.”

51 With this a new era of Helfta begins. For with the new foundation of the Convent of St. Mary, the new vision has in no way come to an end. Planned, and already partly under construction, is a Catholic center for the Diocese of Magdeburg with many religious and secular facilities, in particular, the following:

- The Gertrude Foundation: here women and men can live in rental units or purchase condominiums.
- A nursing home and supervised care apartments: this will provide appropriate living quarters for the elderly and those needing care.
- Hotel and guest house: these are to provide accommodations for guests, tourists, and pilgrims.
- A special events hall: this will seat 450, and provide a place for plays, concerts, presentations, and exhibitions.
- And whatever else the future may bring: vacation lodgings, facilities for “children and families”, studios, a mysticism center, and still other possibilities.

52 These facilities will help make Helfta once again into a cultural center over and above its simple convent life. In addition these supplemental projects ought to help ensure the long-term financial independence of the convent. The development of the project and the construction of the entire Helfta center lie in the hands of the “St. Gertrude Settlement Work, Inc.” From this organization come the ideas and plans for their implementation. Support from major benefactors is expected to finance these projects. Regular donated funds are not being used for these purposes.

53 All readers who wish to get in touch with the convent or support it with donations may do so through the following contacts:

- Kloster Helfta, Lindenstrasse 36, D-06295 Lutherstadt Eisleben
- tel: 03475-711-0; /fax: 03475-71555
- Internet: www.kloster-helfta.de
- Email: Pforte@kloster-helfta.de

- Bank connection: Bank fuer Kirche und Caritas eG, Paderborn, Bankleitzahl (bank sorting code number) 472 603 07, Konto-Nummer (account number) 20 500 600, Verwendungszweck: Spende Aufbau kloster Helfta (use/purpose: building fund donation for the Convent of Helfta).

The convent of Helfta lives! It is a gift of the grace of God as well as a human undertaking at the beginning of the new century and the new millennium. It is a place where God seeks humankind and wants to let Himself be found. All are most cordially welcome!

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CHRONOLOGY

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| 1229 | 6/19: Seven Cistercian nuns move from the Convent of Sts. Jakob and Burchard into the Convent of St. Mary near Mansfeld. |
| 1229 | 6/29: The date of the foundation of the Convent of "St Mary". |
| 1229 | 12/13: The death of Count Burchard of Mansfeld. |
| 1234 | The move of the convent to Rodersdorf. |
| 1240 | The death of Countess Elisabeth of Mansfeld in the convent she founded. |
| 1256 | The construction of the Chapel of St. John as the crypt and oratory of the Family of the Count of Magdeburg. |
| 1258 | The move of the convent to Helfta, east of Eisleben. |
| 1258 | 6/3: Day of the founding and dedication of the Convent of Helfta. |
| 1207--1282 | Mechthild of Magdeburg (remains in Helfta since 1870). |

- 1241--1299 Mechthild of Hackeborn.
1256--1302 Gertrude of Helfta.
1284 The plunder of the convent by Gebhard of Querfurt.
1342 The Destruction of the Convent of Helfta in the “Bishop of Halberstadt feud”.
1343 Relocation of the convent of “Old Helfta” to a place in front of the city walls of Eisleben, thus creating “New Helfta”.
1483--1546 The years of Martin Luther’s birth and death in Eisleben.
1525 5/3: The sisters are driven from New Helfta by rebellious peasants.
1529 After several years of wandering the sisters return to Old Helfta.
1542 The dissolution of the convent in the wake of the Reformation by Count Hans Georg of Mansfeld-Eisleben.
1566 Count Hans Georg of Mansfeld-Eisleben sells the convent lands to Franz von Kerssenbrock.
1641 Swedish Major General Adam von Pfuel inherits the convent lands.
1721 The transformation of the convent lands into a royal property by King Wilhelm I of Prussia.
1865 The opening of the first Catholic church in Eisleben since the Reformation.
1868 The purchase of the convent lands of New Helfta, and the construction of the Catholic parish church of St. Gertrude.
1869 The Benedictine sisters of Perpetual Adoration from Osnabruck attempt to re-establish the convent of New Helfta.
1875 The attempted re-foundation fails because of of Bismark’s “Kulturkampf”.
1945 The convent lands are transformed into a “publicly owned property” (VEG) of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).
1988 The dynamiting of the convent church ruins is prevented.
1989 The peaceful abolishment of the German Democratic Republic by the German people.
1989 Efforts begin to save the convent ruins.
1990 10/3: The reunification of Germany.
1992 6/3: The first Eucharistic celebration in the church ruins on the occasion of the re-foundation of the Convent of Helfta.

- 1992 9/16, 9/17: The founding of the “Association of the Friends of the Convent of Helfta”.
- 1992 12/1: The State of Saxony-Anhalt leases the convent lands of Old Helfta to the Diocese of Magdeburg.
- 1992 12/31: Termination of Helfta’s status as a public estate.
- 1994 8/8: The purchase of the convent lands by the Diocese of Magdeburg.
- 1997 6/7: The laying of the cornerstone for the abbey church and the convent building.
- 1998 4/23: The Diocese of Magdeburg assumes oversight of the reconstruction of Helfta.
- 1998 8/21: The unveiling of the building plaque in the presence of Bishop Nowack and the abbess, Sister Assumpta Schenkl.
- 1998 9/1: The beginning of the reconstruction of the convent of Helfta.
- 1999 3/21: The topping out ceremony of the Abbey Church of St. Mary.
- 1999 8/13: The re-founding of the convent by the Cistercian sisters from the Abbey of Seligenthal, under Abbess Assumpta Schenkl.
- 1999 11/21: The dedication of the Convent of Helfta by Bishop Leo Nowack of Magdeburg.
- 2000 3/30: The transference of the Convent of Helfta from the “Association of the Friends of the Convent of Helfta” to the “St. Mary of Helfta Convent Management, Inc.”
- 2000 9/14: The first new sister in 450 years receives the habit.