
Nothing Was Lost

The Cathedral Thrift House, 1949–2026

An article for the Cathedral Times

by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell

In the summer of 1949, the Woman's Auxiliary of the Cathedral held a rummage sale, and it rained. Left with piles of unsold clothing, they accepted a neighbor's offer of an abandoned taxi stand on Bolling Way. By September they had a shop on Peachtree Road; within a year, 250 volunteers. The Thrift House began with a failure that nobody wasted.

That became its genius. Parishioners gave away good things rather than discard them, and what one household no longer needed became another's necessity. The difference between the two became ministry. Early on, that ministry built the Cathedral itself, paying down the debt on DeOvie's Hall, furnishing its kitchen, and in 1958 making the down payment on what was then the Dean's house and carrying its mortgage. Decades later, it gave toward the new organ five years running. Every time that organ plays, secondhand coats are playing too.

But the money did not stay home. More than \$1.1 million flowed to Atlanta charities: to the Open Door Community, Southern Prison Ministry, shelters for battered women, the Georgia Innocence Project, again and again to Emmaus House, and in its final years to the Boyce L. Ansley School, Respite Care Atlanta, and Kidz2Leaders. A shop born to pay for a parish hall grew to reflect the conscience of the whole parish.

The sale itself was ministry, too. The volunteers of 1952 called their work "the Good Neighbor Policy in action." It looked like a suit for a job interview, dishes for a first apartment, a warm jacket handed to a neighbor without a home. One early volunteer kept a black tablet recording her hours: 4,269 of them across sixteen years. Her entries thin out the year her husband died. The next year she came back. Nellie Holleman and her staff stand in that same line of faithful labor.

In eight homes over seventy-seven years, the Thrift House did the same thing: it took what others set aside and turned it into love, freely given to neighbors it would never meet. The fragments were gathered, as Jesus asked, "so that nothing may be lost." And for all those years, nothing was.

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To everyone who ever sorted a donation, priced a teacup, rang up a sale, or hauled a sofa across town—every manager, staff member, volunteer, donor and customer—thank you. In the work of your hands, we have seen the presence of God, who lets nothing be lost.