Sister Helen Walling grew up in Detroit in a family of seven children. She attended St. Theresa School and was taught by the Adrian Dominican Sisters.

During her senior year of high school, she thought about her future but didn’t know what she wanted to do. She asked her father, who assured her God would guide her. She recalls him saying, “You have to do what God wants you to do.” Her father had been a Christian Brother before he married her mother and had always given good counsel.

Sister Helen thought she might have a vocation. She went to visit the Adrian Dominican Sisters but did not feel comfortable at their Motherhouse. When she returned home, she asked her mother if they could visit her two aunts, IHM Sisters Cleta and Mary Lawrence.

“Sister Mary Lawrence arranged for me to visit two novices,” Sister Helen says. “That opened the door for me! It was a gift from God.” She joined the community at age 16, after high school.

Sister Helen set out on her first ministry at Sacred Heart in Dearborn, Mich., to teach fourth grade. For the next 25 years, she taught grades two through five in schools throughout Michigan. These included Epiphany, St. Cecilia, St. Gregory, Gesu, St. Francis de Sales and St. Mary of Redford in Detroit; St. Michael, Monroe; and St. Vincent de Paul in Pontiac, Mich. She also served as fourth grade teacher and principal at St. Mary in Marshall, Mich.

Following her years of teaching, Sister Helen began her work in parish ministry. She served at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Union City, Mich.; at St. John Parish, in Jackson, Mich.; and at St. Joseph Parish in Lake Orion, Mich. She helped start the Jackson Interfaith Shelter for the poor and homeless in Jackson, raising funds as well as working with those in need.

She also served as pastoral coordinator at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish (Lansing, Mich.); St. Mary on the Lake (Manitou Beach, Mich.); and St. Dominic Parish (Clinton, Mich.). When she retired, she began ministering at St. Joseph Parish (Dexter, Mich.), where she was very involved with a Scripture-sharing group, and also at Cambrian Assisted Living (Tecumseh, Mich.), praying with those who have dementia.

Moving from teaching to parish outreach and then to ministering to those who were homeless, Sister Helen always felt guided by God and did what was needed. There were times at the shelter that she felt threatened but praying with the staff made God’s presence more real. “It helped us remember we were ministering to God’s neediest folks,” she says.
Sister Helen is grateful for having been allowed to set up the shelter. Initially, she did it without a salary and felt great support from the community. “God has blessed me in so many ways, through so many ministries,” she says. “Service never ends. What’s next, God? I’m good to go!”