

## Obituary



Sister Helen Williams, IHM, 84, died Saturday, July 30 at Mercy Memorial Hospital. She had been a resident of the IHM Motherhouse since 2007.

Helen was born in Flint, Mich., Nov. 11, 1931, to Edward and Mary (Wentworth) Williams. She attended and graduated from St. Michael Schools (Flint) and entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe in 1949, receiving the religious name, Sister Marie Vianney.

Sister Helen earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College. In her early teaching career she taught elementary grades at St. Charles, Newport, Mich.; St. Mary of Redford, Detroit; and St. Anne, Warren, Mich., before spending the early 1960s at Assumption in Albuquerque, N.M. She returned to Michigan in 1967 and continued teaching at Detroit's Most Holy Trinity and St. Patrick schools and also served as principal of St. Francis de Sales School.

In 1971, Sister Helen focused on pastoral ministry, religious education / administration. She served at St. Joseph, Erie; St. Lawrence, Utica; and St. Kevin, Inkster. She coordinated religious education and pastoral ministry for five or more years at Our Lady of Victory, Northville; at Our Lady Queen of Saints, Fraser; at St. Germaine, St. Clair Shores; at St. Catherine, Algonac; and at St. Angela in Roseville. She garnered many dear friends from those she met through her various ministries.

Sister Helen moved to the Motherhouse in 2007 and remained active in the IHM community and with friendships across Michigan.

## Remembering

On her page in our book of life, Helen chose Ted Loder's poem *"Help Me Unbury Wonder."* The first stanza of this prayer is on the cover of the Ritual Song book for Eucharistic liturgy.

Oh God of the miracles,  
of galaxies  
and crocuses  
and children.  
I praise you now.

It is within the beauty of this poetic prayer we see a glimpse of who Helen Theresa Williams was.

From the soul of the child within me,  
Shy in my awe,  
Delighted by my foolishness  
Stubborn in my wanting,  
Persistent in my questioning,  
And bold in my asking you  
To help me unbury my talents  
For wonder  
And humor,  
And gratitude.

On Nov. 11, 1931, Helen became the fourth daughter of Mary Elizabeth (Wentworth) and Frank Edward Williams. Her sisters were Mary, Inez (who died at age 9) and Rose, who was 10 years older than Helen.

Her parents met at the country school where her mother, with an education degree from Mt. Pleasant, taught and her father took care of the school. They married in 1915. Family life was very simple and a happy one. Helen's father worked at General Motors for 27 years. They had no car but would make use of the bus system. Mary went to nursing school and Rose worked at AC Spark Plug.

While growing up, her mother made it a point that Helen had playmates of her own age. An aunt lived not far from them so Helen and her cousins did all the things children do. Often the Williams family rode to Clare, Mich., where she could enjoy the simple joys of a child with her cousins.

Family life was important to Helen as a child and as an adult. She experienced family in her neighborhood, which provided many playmates; moreover, the friendship cultivated here continued through both Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Helen attended St. Michael in Flint all 12 years.

Helen's mother developed cancer when Helen was 5 years old and died when Helen was 11. Dad became mother as well as father. Mrs. Williams died on Dec. 17, and her burial was on Dec. 23. This was always a difficult time with so many memories. Helen describes this time as a time of family growing closer; her dad found his wife's death extremely excruciating; her sisters were very kind, generous and loving. They

continued to live in the family home after Mary and her husband purchased it. Helen later lived with her sister Rose and her husband Charlie. Helen was in the convent when her dad died in 1954.

Of her high school years, Helen described them as “normal;” the usual shyness, foolishness and stubbornness, persistence in asking questions, delighting in the usual teen-age pranks and developing gifts of mind, body, soul and heart while “boldly asking God to unbury her talents for wonder, humor and gratitude,

“So I may invest them eagerly  
in the recurring mysteries  
of spring and beginnings.  
of the willows that weep,  
and the rivers that flow,  
and people who grow,  
in such endlessly amazing,  
and often painful ways.”

Helen had a personal relation with all the IHM Sisters who taught her; she did enjoy her high school years but had not seriously considered a religious vocation until the pastor took a group of young women to Monroe. From that day forward, Helen’s thoughts veered towards the IHMs in Monroe.

At age 18, Helen entered the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on Aug. 21, 1949. When she entered the front door, the first person she met was Sister Virginia Mary (Kate Smith) a recently professed sister. Helen looked at her and said in a very joyful but determined manner, “Here I am to stay – where do I go?” Sister looked at her with a twinkle in her eyes and responded: “Oh yeah and how do you know you’re going to stay?” And as they say: the rest is history!

Helen’s religious class was the first to begin the Sister Formation Program, earning their educational degrees prior to beginning teaching. Seventy-one entered, representing most of the places where IHMs taught; 33 were professed. Helen received a bachelor’s degree in education from Marygrove College, Detroit; a master’s degree in education from Wayne State University, Detroit; and furthered her studies at the College of St. Joseph and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

To whatever ministry Helen was assigned or discerned, she poured her heart and soul into it ... joyfully, eagerly and with great excitement. For 24 years of teaching primary grades, Helen loved preparing these little ones for the reception of the sacraments.

Children from Newport, Erie, Warren, Detroit and Redford, all in Michigan and Albuquerque, knew their prayers, the A,B,C's, math and how loved they were by God and their own families.

Helen spent 42 years in parish ministry as pastoral associate, and/or religious education director. She loved, in a special manner, her ministry in the RCIA programs where she brought the same passion to the adults and young ones of parishes in Utica, Fraser, Algonac, Northville, Roseville, Inkster, Erie and St. Clair Shores, Mich.

Knowing her own gifts and talents, Helen

“... invested them eagerly  
in the recurring mysteries,  
of spring and beginnings,  
of willows that weep,  
and rivers that flow,  
and people who grow  
in such endlessly amazing,  
and often painful ways.

In her Ministry Commitment forms, Helen wrote of trying to focus on the need in her own growing pains to deepen her relationship with God as well as serving the children, adults and families in every place sister ministered. She felt the desperate need for reconciliation and peace for all families. In her own creative ways, she tried to make all aware of their responsibility to work for social justice. Helen worked with several dioceses in developing creative RCIA programs. She spent hours training adults as catechetical instructors.

Helen was truly a happy person. She greeted everyone with that broad smile of hers. Quick on the draw with short quips, she laughed with others and could laugh at herself.

Helen loved the Eucharistic liturgy. Christ was the center of her life. She spent an hour every day in the presence of the Eucharist.

A favorite theme of Scripture was that of Jesus and two travelers on the road to Emmaus; Jesus listening, then speaking and stopping with two travelers to break bread. This taught her how to listen, to share the word and share the Eucharist. A phrase that spoke to her in a powerful way was “loving service.” She exemplified “loving service” in her years of active ministry and carried it with her through her retirement years.

Helen moved into our Motherhouse in 2007 after the congregation asked sisters to save us money by occupying our empty rooms. She arrived in July and until February of this year, Helen served wherever and whatever the greater need: as sister sacristan, Eucharistic minister, in the Service Office or driving others to doctors, to the airport or to a sister's home event when a sister did not drive. Helen loved it here. She entered joyfully into every aspect of community life, even assisting with our monthly bingos.

In February, she spent several days in the hospital, which began her using oxygen at all times. When the unknown illness moved her into Main Floor Health Care and no one could explain what was happening to her satisfaction, Helen became frightened. She had never been ill at any time in her life. She knew Jesus was asking her to walk the way of the cross, and she did.

She improved somewhat and began using her mobile scooter again. We had some dear quality times together. Her frequent bouts with nausea made her feel terrible yet every time I visited with her she would have the TV Food Network Channel on. "Helen what are you doing?" She then would laugh and expound on what technique she learned or how much better it might taste if they added her suggestion to the recipe.

On the Fourth of July, we took our last trip around campus. We ordered a pizza and waited for our order seated in the kiosk near the labyrinth. Helen took only one bite and could not continue. We packed up the food and took it to the back door. I thought this was it for the evening, but not Helen. She wanted to ride around the campus. For an hour and a half, we drove all around the campus, stopping at various sites, reflecting on them, and then continuing on our way. Helen wanted to go to the cemetery but as we arrived at the fork in the road, she decided not to. We were both uncertain how much battery-life we had and not a soul was around. We even tried to go to Danny's for ice cream ... but between us we didn't have enough money for even splitting one cone.

Yes, Helen, we pray with you ... "That you will be forever linked and loyal to justice and joy, simplicity and humanity, Christ and His Kingdom."

Ciao, my dear friend, Helen, into eternal peace. We miss you but rejoice you are with family and friends and Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

Written and delivered by Josephine M. Sferrella, IHM  
Aug. 2, 2016