



Birth
July 2, 1926

Baptism
July 18, 1926

Profession
July 30, 1947

Death
June 1, 2013

Burial
Sancta Maria
in Ripa Cemetery
St. Louis Missouri

*Precious and blessed is
the death of the faithful
before God... for
they die in union with
their dear Jesus, in the
grace of God, in peace.*

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

In Loving Memory

Sister M. Helena Leach, SSND

Mary Marcian Leach was born on July 2, 1926, in St. Louis, Missouri. She was the second of four children and the only daughter born to Helen (Dial) and Leon Leach. In baptism she was given the name of her mother's best friend, Sister Mary Marcian.

Novice Helena reflected, "It was on the feast of the Visitation that I breathed my first." Interestingly, it was almost 87 years later and only hours after the relocated Visitation feast that she breathed her last, on June 1, 2013, at Anna House.

During her youth, Mary Marcian was strongly influenced by the interests of her three brothers, John, Jim and Bob, and their friends: their sports, their attitudes, their attire, their language. Undisputed was her nickname "Tomboy Leach." She related, "I wanted to be the first woman professional baseball player."

Circumstances located the Leach family in four parishes in the St. Louis area during her youth. Mary Marcian's first through fifth grade teachers were the Sisters of St. Joseph; her contact with the School Sisters of Notre Dame began in the sixth grade. She admitted, "I had no particular liking for, nor interest in, either group of sisters." This disappointed her mother who had aspired to be a religious and had hopes for Mary Marcian living this dream. A glimpse of her persistent faith was evident at the time of her graduation from elementary school. With ardent prayer and penance, Mary Marcian persuaded her parents how unhappy she would be with "that black gowned crew tagging after me." So instead of the nearby Notre Dame High School on the campus of the SSND motherhouse, she was allowed to attend Mehlville Public High School. The family lived so near the motherhouse that her brother, Jim, was a frequent server at daily Mass at Ripa.

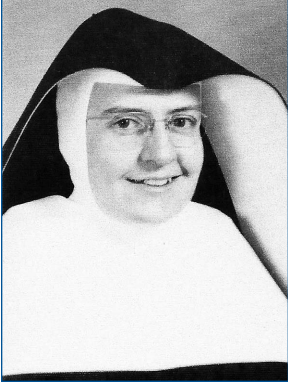
Proximity doesn't quite explain how it happened that Mary Marcian enrolled as the only secular in Notre Dame Junior College. She wrote, "I enrolled in September, never entertaining for a moment the thought of entering the candidature." Candidates who entered in 1944 and all the Ripa residents wondered, even as they accepted, this skirt-and-blouse-clad student among them. She continued, "Strangely I felt at home and at ease with the candidates regardless of the fact that I was only one and they numbered more than forty. Their edifying conduct and pleasant dispositions demanded my admiration. My instructors were a great influence. Particularly, I saw in Sister Lelia that ideal that I had longingly hoped for. I began to realize I was being called to be a religious. I entered the candidature in February 1945." At reception into the novitiate, she was given the name Mary Helena, her mother's name.

After profession of first vows on July 30, 1947, she began her more than a half-century as the quintessential religious educator. Sister Helena surfaced the advice of her namesake, Sister Marcian, "Follow the example of Veronica who presented her veil to Jesus; she knew just what to do at the moment she was needed."

Teaching, during the first five years, took Sister Helena to the children in the elementary grades in Scott City and St. Louis in Missouri and Quincy

continued

In Loving Memory



Sister M. Helena Leach



To make a memorial gift,
please visit our secure
online donation page [here](#)>

For more information,
contact info@ssndcp.org.

www.ssndcentralpacific.org



**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD
THROUGH EDUCATION

and Effingham in Illinois. In 1952, academically prepared with bachelor's and master's degrees in English and a high esteem of the English language, she began to help the older, adolescent learners grow in such appreciation at Redemptorist High School in New Orleans. For most of the next two decades Sister Helena taught in the territory that became the Dallas Province. This new entity was formed in 1961 while she was teaching at Redemptorist High School in Baton Rouge. Here she was remembered as "a teacher who was demanding of her students; she was fair; the students loved her; she never stinted in time or effort for the learner." Though Sister Helena came back to the North, she remained a member of the Dallas Province as it evolved into the Central Pacific Province.

Sister Helena's language skills and journalism training made her a logical choice as the North American provinces filled a three-year position with interprovincial communications in 1970.

When Sister Helena returned to the classroom, she taught one year at St. Gerard Catholic School in San Antonio, Texas and then spent the next 30 years in St. Louis area schools. Nearness to her mother, a resident at the shrine apartments at Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois was of great solace to Sister Helena and to her mother.

She will long be remembered by all in contact with her during her two decades of teaching at Althoff Catholic High School in Belleville, Illinois. A staff member recalled, "She was an amazing English teacher."

And a student reported, "I had heard she was really nice, really strict, and one of the hardest teachers at the school. She's more bouncy than I expected a nun to be." A tribute to this unusual nun and teacher was published in a five-page pictorial and text spread in the Sunday magazine of the *Belleville News-Democrat*, in March 1997, a year before her retirement.

Part of that amazing and bouncy person were the life-long St. Louis Cardinal fan traits that permeated her life — characteristic attire, classroom décor, conversation, attendance at the opening game each season with her brother, Jim. Sister Helena dedicated her time and talent to the learner at the Notre Dame Tutorial Center and to the community with whom she lived. Her faithful participation, her humor, her support made it possible to serve many who needed help in literature and language. She was at the center from early morning until well into the supper hours, teaching one pupil or small groups of students.

Sister Helena told her companions, her students, anyone who knew her, "I want to die with my boots on — teaching." A positive response to this firm wish she was not able to wrest from God. Some memory difficulties brought her to The Sarah Community in 2004. The next years were challenging ones for her. Her vigorous responses in gratitude, in frustrations, and in relationships will be missed by all who met and knew her.

A wake/vigil was held at Anna House and Theresa Center on June 7, 2013. Rev. Terrence Moran, CSsR was presider at the Mass of Christian Burial the following morning. Interment was in the Ripa cemetery.

Sister Helena is survived by her brother, Jim [Carla] of St. Clair, Missouri; sister-in-law, Ruth; nieces, nephews and other relatives. May she now rest in the peace and happiness of her eternal life!

By Sister MarieClare Powell, SSND