



In Loving Memory

Sister M. Helene Schmitz, SSND

Sister M. Helene Schmitz, 93, died Friday, February 22, 2013, in Notre Dame Health Care Center, Our Lady of Good Counsel Campus, Mankato, Minnesota. Sister Helene had been in declining health for some time, but her condition deteriorated markedly two days before her death.

The third child of thirteen, Sister Helene was born January 24, 1920, near Raymond, Iowa. She wrote in her autobiography, "The next day I was taken in a bobsled over five miles of snow drifts to Immaculate Conception Church, Gilbertville, Iowa, to be made a child of God. I was baptized Florence Mary. As soon as I could talk, Mother taught me my prayers."

Florence entered first grade at Immaculate Conception School in Gilbertville in September 1925. While attending upper grades, Florence began to think about becoming a sister. She wrote, "It was in eighth grade that my desire to be a sister began. I was encouraged by the silent example of my teacher. Mother and Dad were very happy when I made known my desire. On Graduation day, in June 1933, I told Sister Superior, who made the necessary arrangements for my entrance into the Aspiranture in September 1933." Florence spent three happy years as an aspirant, and she was preparing to go back for her senior year. She continued, "But Venerable Mother Superior wrote on August 8, 1936, that I could enter the candidature on August 27. It was hard to break home ties so suddenly, but Mother and Dad willingly helped me get ready."

During her first year in the candidature, Florence completed her high school classes, and in her second year, she was sent to St. Donatus, Iowa, to do her practice teaching. A few weeks later, in October 1937, she was sent to Clarkston, Washington, where she spent eight months teaching the third and fourth grades and then returned to the motherhouse to spend another year of preparation in the candidature. On July 21, 1939, Florence was received into the novitiate and given the name Sister M. Helene.

After profession in 1940, Sister Helene began the first of three ministries: educator in Catholic schools. She taught upper grades in the following schools: St. Francis de Sales, St. Paul (1940-48); St. Joseph, Red Wing (1948-49); Sacred Heart, Eden, South Dakota (1949-55); St. Peter, Hokah (1955-56); St. Anne, Wabasso (1956-57); St. Dominic, Northfield (1957-63); and Sacred Heart, St. Paul (1963-65). She earned her B.A. from the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, in 1948; a certificate in theology from the Theological Institute of Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, in 1960; and a certificate from the National Center of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, College of St. Mary, Omaha, in 1964. In 1969, she earned an M.A. in sacred doctrine from St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Sister Helene's studies in theology formed the foundation for her second ministry: religious educator. After the Second Vatican Council, Sister Helene became a province pioneer in the field of religious education. When the Catholic high school in Hokah closed in 1965, the Fitzgerald Catechetical

Birth
January 24, 1920

Baptism
January 25, 1920

First Profession
July 22, 1940

Death
February 22, 2013

Burial
Our Lady of
Good Counsel Cemetery,
Mankato, Minnesota

*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

continued

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THROUGH EDUCATION

School was opened in neighboring LaCrescent. Sister Helene and Sister Denis (Candace) Nuese staffed this center and lived in the Hokah convent. LaCrescent High School, located across the street from the center, released students to attend religion classes, taught by the two sisters. Sister Helene remained at the Fitzgerald center until 1970. She also worked in the field of religious education in St. Michael Parish, St. Michael (1970-72); Epiphany Parish, Coon Rapids, (1972-73); St. Ann Parish, Janesville (1973-76); and St. John Catechetical School, Minnesota Lake (1976-85.) During her years at Janesville, she also served as a driver at Good Counsel.

In 1985, Sister Helene began her third ministry: parish minister, especially to the elderly. From 1985 until 1990, she lived at Notre Dame Pastoral Center at SS. Peter and Paul Parish, Mankato, and spent time each week at several Mankato nursing homes and senior citizen residences. In 1990, Sister Helene moved to St. Wenceslaus Parish in New Prague, where she continued the same type of work. In 2000, when the parish convent closed, Sister Helene became a volunteer minister to the elderly, and moved into a senior-citizen apartment. At that time, she wrote, "Twelve years ago, when Sister Maria Adrien [Pekó] from Rome visited Mankato, I had the opportunity to visit with her. Sister asked if I had any dreams or goals for the future. I responded that I dreamed of living in a high-rise with the elderly and ministering to them. Sister said, 'And why not? Go for it!' I told her that as long as a convent was available I didn't feel it was right to pay rent for an apartment. Now there is an opportunity to fulfill my dream after twelve years of waiting, and I would appreciate the privilege of doing this for awhile before moving to Good Counsel." Sister Helene "fulfilled her dream" until 2006, when she moved to Good Counsel in full retirement.

The funeral Mass for Sister Helene, with Father Andrew Olsem as president, was held Tuesday, February 26, in Good Counsel Chapel, followed by burial in the cemetery. Sister Helene is survived by one sister, Sister Dolores Schmitz, SSND, Mankato, nieces and nephews and their families, and her sisters in community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was preceded in death by her parents, Leo and Martha (Tegeler) Schmitz, nine brothers, Reynold, Leo, Robert, Irvin, Louis, Paul, Gerald, Norbert and Kenneth, and two sisters, Esther Overmann and Mary Rose Carpenter.

By Sister Mary Kay Ash, SSND