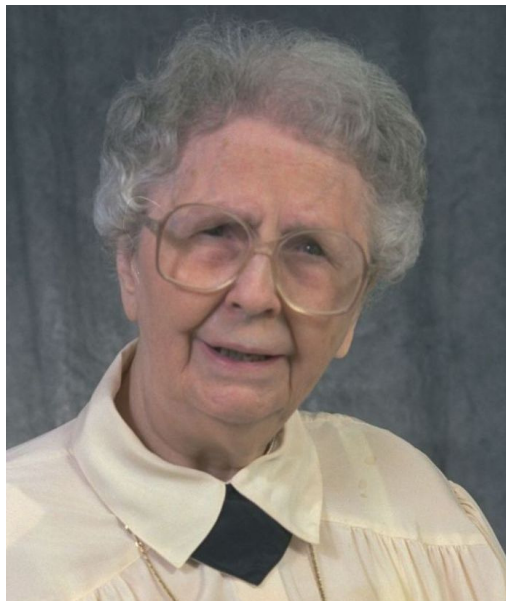


Remembering Sister Marie Helen Milliken

Nov. 12, 1910-June 1, 2009



Wherever you were in the house, Marie Helen, one was always drawn to the beautiful classical music flowing out of your room. Like your music, your heart reached out to all who struggled, be they children or adults.

Kathleen Margaret Milliken, Sister Marie Helen, was the first child born to Margaret Naar and Joseph Milliken in Saginaw, Michigan. She, her sister and four brothers were raised in a loving family. Later, the Milliken family moved to Detroit. At first, Kathleen and her brothers were enrolled in a public school. Then they transferred to St. Agnes. It was here that Kathleen saw her first IHM Sister. Upon seeing Sister Marie Benedict, Marie Helen said to her mother, "Oh

Mama, isn't she beautiful! I am going to be one just like her." When she grew older, her mother told her, "Your response haunted me for years – you were always so determined." Entering the convent on July 1, 1927 at age 16, Sister remembered being very lonesome, but always firm in her vocation, regardless of rather delicate health for many years.

Marie Helen received a degree in music and a master's in education, with a minor in music literature. From 1928 until 1970, she taught at schools in the metropolitan Detroit area. Sister taught various combinations of private music lessons, choral, Latin, algebra, grades 7, 8 and high school English. She finished her teaching career as superior – principal and choral director at Holy Cross, Marine City. Marie Helen loved teaching; she was always interested in her students as persons. Her compassionate heart had room for all their problems. A real source of joy in her retirement years was hearing from or about her former students.

In 1970, Sister responded to a plea to become a coordinator of religious education at St. Lawrence in Miami, Fla. She continued this ministry in Lansing, Redford and St. Michael, Monroe. At St. Michael, Marie Helen had the opportunity to minister to the "underprivileged side of our society," dope addicts, unwed mothers, unwanted children, drop outs, welfare victims and those who never knew where they would find their next meal and/or a place to sleep.

It was here that Sister was initiated into a new venture. It had come to the attention of the pastor, Father Ted Fujawa, that there was a need to assist widowed persons. Father decided they should begin a support group which would be trained to relate to these persons. In her role as leader of Christian Service

and Adult Formation, Marie Helen studied the needs of widows at the regional and national level. Sister Marie Helen and her co-workers named the organization, "New Life." She told the story of how a newly widowed woman was struggling with the empty chair in her living room. Another woman remarked, "I turned his chair around and now I sit in it." Several professional persons were contacted and hired. These programs were publicized through the local papers, church organizations and funeral directors. The sessions were offered for the whole county. A further development was to stabilize the office at the Catholic Charity Center. In addition, programs for bereaved persons were offered at Monroe County Community College. Over the space of several years, about 600 persons benefited from these services. This outreach program became an evolving ministry – one person helping another in a common bond of grief. Due to a hip injury and illness, Marie Helen was unable to continue this ministry. At the present time, a widow's support group organizes the program. Sister commented that after five years as director, she experienced an increase of deep compassion for bereaved persons extending to all the members of the family.

Her years at the Health Care Center expanded her compassionate heart again. Always Marie Helen had an understanding heart for those who cared for her. Often, she'd share their painful stories with me. On her page in the IHM Book of Life, she wrote, "So many women, young or older, were caught up in society's many changes. The sexual revolution caused many women to end up as unwed mothers or in divorce; society approved legal abortion and live-in couples. This only resulted in misery for these good women. Once again, Marie Helen listened and prayed for them. She gave away enough copies of "*loving yourself more*" by Virginia A. Froehle, RSM, to have stock in the publishing company. She continually spoke to them about God's abundant love. She was God's love for them. She remarked, "I am grateful for the help I was able to give these women."

Concluding her autobiography, Marie Helen wrote, "Life is too short to serve so many needs. I am deeply grateful for my community and the privilege of serving so many persons as an IHM Sister. My words fail to express my thanks to my Sisters and superiors for their help and inspiration throughout the years....My special devotion has always been to the Trinity and to Mary. My motto is from St. Paul: 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.'" She commented that God let her live so long so she could give people a piece of her mind. During these past years, Marie Helen prayed for all her loved ones and their families. Sister ended her autobiographical reflection saying, "I believe I grow to love them more each day as I recommend them to the Lord. This love will continue throughout all eternity, where we shall be united once again in the Lord.

"Praise God, Our Father, for all His goodness to me."

Written by Judith Bonini, IHM
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