



SISTER HELEN LOUISE CONNELLY
January 29, 1913 - March 4, 2005

Mary Ellen Connelly was born on January 29, 1913, to Margaret Connelly and Thomas Connelly. She was baptized at Saint Kieran Church. Mary Ellen was the second of seven children. Her older sister was Margaret, whom we knew as Sister Mary Amy. The other siblings in order after Mary Ellen were Martin and Thomas, known in the religious order of Christian Brothers as Brother Thomas and Brother Damien, Michael, Catherine, and Anna Marie. Helen Louise's family was always a source of great pride to her and it was clear that they were always in her heart and in her prayers. Mary Ellen attended Saint Stephen School in Hazelwood and Sacred Heart High School. She entered the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1929, after her sophomore year.

Mary Ellen Connelly became known in religion as Sister Helen Louise. To her family she remained Honey. It may have been a nickname, but the name suited her and clearly defined who she was. She was always sweet, gentle, kind, and endearing. Her mission experiences included Saint Luke in Carnegie, Saint John the Baptist in Scottsdale, Saints Peter and Paul in Tucson, DePaul Institute, Roselia Foundling, Assumption Hall, and, finally, Caritas Christi.

When I was asked to speak about Sister Helen Louise, the piece of art that Sister Fides Glass tastefully captured in beautiful calligraphy came to my mind. *Humility Charity Simplicity and Remember that GOD is ever present!* This art piece has since been photographed, multiplied, framed and prominently placed in our local communities. It serves to keep us mindful of the spirit of our call to serve the people of God as Mother Seton's Sisters of Charity wherever we are. Helen Louise exemplified these virtues. She was humble, charitable, always seeing the good in others, and she lived a simple life. She modeled for us how to live in God's presence while ministering to others with gentleness, care, compassion, and affection.

To know Sister Helen Louise was to love her. She had the rare gift of exuding goodness. The story of her life can be captured in the words, *"She has done all things well."* Figuratively, it could be said of her, *"She has made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."* For the years she lived and worked at DePaul Institute as teacher of deaf children, as Sister Servant and as principal, she demonstrated a caring, calming presence in direct service to children and their families and to her sisters in community. Her title changed, but her manner did not. No matter what she was asked to do she remained sweet, gentle, kind, and endearing. She was truly a Honey!

Helen Louise exercised the virtue of charity in her dealings with everyone. As a teacher she taught her students creatively, knowledgeably, insightfully, and developed in them a love for learning. She led them to know and love God, and to understand the meaning of service. Helen Louise was a special person in the eyes of all whom she taught. She brought warmth and care into the classroom. Her students knew that they were special in her eyes, but when it was necessary to do so she corrected with firmness and gentleness. She delighted in sharing stories about the children and how they made her day. Last night one of her former students came to pay her respects. She said Helen Louise was her favorite teacher. That sentiment could be repeated many times over by her students.

Though Helen Louise had many more years of experience as a Sister of Charity and as an educator of the deaf than those of us who came to DePaul much later, she became a pillar of strength upon whom we depended for support. She welcomed our questions, quelled the anxieties we had about teaching, encouraged us with kind words, and sometimes challenged us with her own gentle style of tough love. We could approach her with anything and she would be there for us. She helped us to laugh at our own mistakes and she would invite us to laugh with her at some of her own. She was a mentor par excellence. Although we recognized and respected her for her years of experience as a Sister of Charity and as a teacher of the deaf, we never felt as though she thought of herself as anything but a companion on the way or as a professional peer.

As Sister Servant and principal she led by influence and example. We looked to her as a person we would like to imitate. She was available, approachable, comforting, unassuming, and always patient with our follies and foibles. She had a great sense of humor. She was a wisdom figure. We could share our trials and tribulations with her and would always feel uplifted when we walked away. She seemed to be in touch with the truth of who she was as a child of God. She was humble, trustworthy, sincere, loyal, prayerful and unswerving in her fidelity to God and to the Church

One of my earliest memories of her was when I was a very young sister at DePaul. She was at the front desk of the old building and, for some reason, I was there, too. It was a bitter cold winter day. The doorbell rang, and the mail carrier delivered some packages. It was clear that this gentleman was very, very cold. Without hesitation Sister Helen Louise asked if he would like something hot to drink. It was a learning experience for me and I remember thinking to myself on that occasion, this is an example of how we must “carry Christ to all whom we serve.” She exemplified the meaning of the words, “Whatever you do to the least of mine you do to me.”

Her willingness to return to duties as a classroom teacher after having served as Sister Servant, principal, and administrator of Roselia was a great lesson. Her former administrative experiences did not deter her from being where she was needed. She went where she was called to serve and did so unhesitatingly believing that that was where God wanted her to be. She was truly a disciple of the Lord in the spirit of Vincent and Elizabeth. We were privileged to have known her, to have loved her, and to have learned from her. We thank God for the blessings that her presence in our lives brought to us.

Dear Helen Louise, the goodness of your life and works goes before you. Go now to the heavenly mansion prepared for you from all eternity to rest forever in God’s presence in the company of the angels, saints, and those among your family and friends who preceded you. As we take leave of you we ask you to remember us and pray that we, too, may grow in humility, charity, and simplicity remembering God’s ever-present spirit in and around us wherever we are called to serve as Sisters of Charity.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Virginia Pascaretta
March 8, 2005*