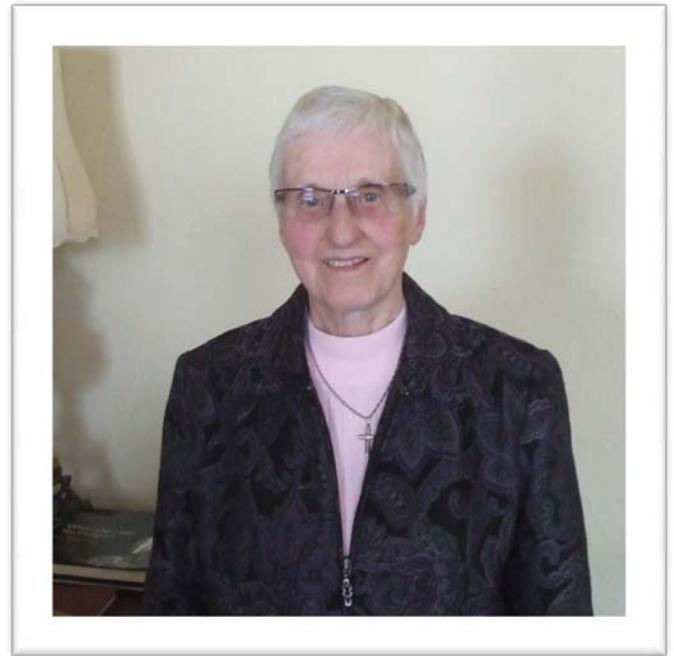


## Sister Helen Moores

**“You are my angel.”**

Sister Helen Moores vividly remembers the Sisters of Charity who taught her at St. Joseph School in Roxbury, MA. “I can still see their faces as they were talking to us or out playing games with us.” The joy and kindness of these sisters made an indelible impression upon Helen, who has followed their example in her own ministry. Through Sister Helen, the legacy of happy, caring teachers continues, and another generation of students will always remember the Sister of Charity who found such joy in enabling them to succeed.



Helen Moores was the fifth of six children and the only girl in her family. She recalls, “When we were young, if anyone asked us what we wanted to be, the girls would say ‘sister’ and the boys would say ‘priest.’” For Helen, the attraction to religious life was more than a childhood fancy. Helen was drawn to the vibrant, energetic sisters and observed and appreciated how they encouraged and nurtured their students. By the time she was a junior in high school, Helen began to wonder whether she truly had a vocation. When she went on a school trip to Convent Station, “most of the girls went to see the college, but I had my own agenda. I wanted to learn about the convent.”

Helen returned from her visit to Convent Station knowing that she would join the Sisters of Charity. Her only real hesitation was that the Sisters of Charity were known as a teaching order, and she wasn’t sure that she wanted to teach. Helen remembers, “My mother was thrilled I was entering the convent but she wasn’t thrilled I was leaving Massachusetts. She cried all the way from Boston to Convent Station.”

Sister Helen’s first mission was teaching first grade at St. Mary’s School in Waterbury, CT. At the beginning, the job of teaching so many little children seemed overwhelming. “All I could think of was what can I do with these four and five year olds, who are really just babies?” Sister Helen worked through her early jitters with the help of the veteran teachers who lived in the convent with her. “I probably got the best education ever, learning how to teach from them. They were a tremendous help.”

With this help, Sister Helen’s confidence in herself as a teacher grew. She knew for certain that “this was the community I should have entered and this is what I was supposed to do.”

One of Sister Helen’s first grade students in Waterbury came to have a profound effect on the future course of her ministry. She recalls, “This little boy just sat in his chair, looking out at the trees, and all he would say all day was ‘scrambled eggs, scrambled eggs.’ Today we would say he was autistic.” Though Sister Helen’s heart went out to the boy, she felt that she was unable to do much for him.

Sister Helen went on from her mission in Waterbury to teach at St. Peter’s School in Jersey City and St. Stephen’s School in Kearny, NJ. During this time, the desire to help children with special needs that was sparked by the little boy in Waterbury prompted Sister Helen to earn a Master’s Degree in Special Education. She used this training to teach special education for eight years in a public school in Secaucus before returning to Catholic schools as principal of St. Aloysius School in Jersey City.

For the past 13 years, Sister Helen has served as the Coordinator of the Program for Academically Challenged Students at Marist High School in Bayonne. Her gift of helping students achieve their full potential continues

to bless the students in this wonderful program. She says, “I’m just so happy for my students. I can see from year to year how far they have come. I honestly think that’s what makes me continue doing what I’m doing.”

Sister Helen remembers, “There was one boy, very quiet, and when he was in his senior year, he was really failing. The principal asked if I would work with him and tutor him, which I did. After he got through the year and he graduated, he came up to me and he hugged me and kissed me and he said, ‘My mother says you are my angel.’” Thanks to his “angel,” the boy went on to Felician College.

In addition to the satisfaction of helping students succeed academically, Sister Helen is gratified by seeing her students gain social confidence and acceptance in the Marist community. “The students in the program are respected just as the others are. No one makes fun of them or calls them names.” Sister Helen was deeply touched by Richard, who was the first autistic boy in the program. “Richard was a wonderful young man, and he not only progressed through the four years at Marist but he went into New Jersey Institute of Technology and he’s graduated since then.” Sister Helen explains that “at Marist High School, five special awards are given to graduates after the baccalaureate mass. Four awards are for the four Marist principles and the fifth one is an overall award. Richard was the first student from our program to receive that overall Marist award. When they called his name, everyone in that church stood up and cheered. It was mind boggling. So many people helped him through. The award was like icing on the cake, so to speak.”

To Sister Helen, helping students with special needs is a natural extension of what the Sisters of Charity have always done to help the poor, whether poor financially or poor academically. She says, “I was well into my religious life when I realized just exactly what we are all about, to help the poor.” She adds, “Maybe it was my fault because I wasn’t listening!” She continues to be inspired by the foundresses who started religious congregations with nothing and were able to touch so many people.

“I’m really proud to be a Sister of Charity. Even with diminishing numbers and age, we still have the energy and motivation to do as much as we can. If we can’t do it, we get those who can and will do it.”

Just as young Helen was impressed by the happiness of the sisters who taught her back in Roxbury, MA, people who meet Sister Helen today must be equally impressed by her evident happiness and the joy and satisfaction she receives from religious life. “I’ve had 57 very, very good years!”