

*I shall sing to my God  
as long as I live.*  
Ps. 146

## Sister Helen (Mary Pierre) Liewer, FSPA



Sister Helen Liewer, FSPA, 88, died Friday, August 29, 2003, at Villa St. Joseph, La Crosse. She was in the sixty-eighth year of her religious profession.

Sister Helen had been anointed earlier in the week. Several days following she became unresponsive. Friday morning a nurse had turned her. Shortly thereafter she died very peacefully at 8:35 a.m.

Sister Helen was born to Peter and Mary (Book) Liewer on December 2, 1914, in Bloomfield, Nebraska, the third of three children. At her baptism she was named Helen Veronica. At the age of five during the 1919 flu epidemic her mother died. Two years later her father married Edith Dwyer, a blessing for the family, and two more siblings, a brother and a sister, joined the family.

Helen began her education at Holy Trinity School in Hartington, Nebraska under the direction of the Ursulines. During this time she took piano lessons. She completed her sophomore year and the seeds of her vocation began to take root. Upon finishing her schooling at Yankton, South Dakota, her father consented to her request to enter religious life. Helen's aunt, Sister Devota Liewer, wrote to Helen in 1931 after she had written of her desire to enter religious life and to follow a career in nursing rather than teaching because of her discouragement in the past with school work. Sister Devota wisely suggested that she begin as a teacher and later enter nursing if she didn't like teaching. Because the family had moved frequently and Helen was not close to any of the three religious orders who taught her, she chose FSPA because of her father's sister. Helen entered St. Rose Convent on June 23, 1932.

Helen was received into the novitiate and given the name Sister Mary Pierre on August 8, 1933. She pronounced first vows on August 6, 1935, and final vows on August 9, 1941. When sisters could return to their baptismal names, Sister Mary Pierre chose to be known as Sister Helen.

Sister Helen registered at Viterbo College and within the week after an audition in the music department she was registered as a Music Major. After three and one-half years of teaching she was recalled to La Crosse to change her applied major from piano-organ to 'cello and voice. Sister Helen said that "this was done because the college needed a cellist for North Central Accreditation. I spent the next four years during the war ('42-'46) traveling every two weeks by train across the state to the Wisconsin Conservatory at Milwaukee. Eventually I graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Music." After having earned her degree she taught music in parochial schools in Iowa and Wisconsin. When Blessed Sacrament School opened, she was asked to set up the music program. She taught at Viterbo College for nine years and during that time directed the St. Rose Convent Choir. Despite several health issues she was able to complete 48 years of teaching.

Sister Helen had an interest in holistic medicine. She became certified in Reiki and in GIM (Guided Imagery and Music) and felt that both methods could help reduce stress and balance mind, body and spirit. After retiring to St. Rose Convent in 1978 she continued to teach music and help others with holistic therapies. She retired to Villa St. Joseph in 1995.

Family, friends and community members remember Sister Helen as a woman of prayer. She was an excellent teacher and many remember her contagious smile. As Director of the St. Rose Convent Choir many remember how particular she was about correct breathing and blending the sound to make beautiful music.

Sister Helen is survived by her Franciscan Community; one brother, Dr. Jack Liewer; one sister-in-law, Mrs. Walter Liewer; and nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers, Edwin and Walter, and one sister, Betty Jane.

Visitation will be from 4:00 until 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> at St. Rose Convent. A prayer service will be held at 7 p.m. in Mary of the Angels Chapel. Reverend Thomas O'Neill, Chaplain at Viterbo University, will preside at the Mass of Christian Burial in Mary of the Angels Chapel at 10:30 a.m., Wednesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Burial will be in Gate of Heaven Catholic Cemetery, La Crosse.

Memorials may be sent to Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, 912 Market Street, La Crosse, WI 54601-8800.