

January 18, 1993

Dear Sisters and Associates,



“For everything there is a season...a time to be born and a time to die...” These are familiar words from Ecclesiastes and yet the death of SISTER HELEN DANENBERG seemed “untimely.” Perhaps it was because Helen was such a vibrant, active person, involved in so many areas of life. Perhaps it was that we, her Community, family and friends were unprepared for the news of her condition.

As coordinator of the OLV Community since January of 1991, Helen was busy this past summer making arrangements and welcoming the many Sisters who came to Victory Noll. At the same time, she was experiencing physical distress of which few of us were aware. It was not until October that tests proved abdominal cancer was so pervasive that it would only be a matter of time, perhaps a few months. Helen rejected the idea of chemotherapy, knowing that it would be futile. Shortly after her condition was diagnosed, surgery was performed to remove blockage of her digestive system, but eating solid food remained a problem. Later it became necessary to resort to intravenous feeding.

Family members from Michigan visited frequently to lend their support. Sister Sharon Rose and others were able to be of assistance to Helen in helping her to remain at peace through the various stages of a terminal illness. Sisters took turns at her bedside, around the clock, for a week prior to her death. Helen was conscious almost until the end, and heavy sedation was administered to relieve the pain during her final days. Sister Janet Thill and others were with her when she died, peacefully, at 4:45 PM on January 8.

Born September 20, 1931 in Allendale, Michigan, Helen was the youngest member of a family that included one sister and six brothers. One brother preceded her in death. Helen grew up on a farm; she loved the earth, nature, animals.

On September 6, 1954 Helen entered Victory Noll. She made first profession of vows on August 5, 1956. The next ten years were spent in Religious Education in Delhi, Iowa, San Basilio Convent in Los Angeles, McAllen, Texas and Neosho, Missouri. For a time she served as Superior at our convent in Durant, Oklahoma, after which she returned to college. Helen earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of Detroit and a Master's in Social Work from Wayne State University.

After graduation, Helen's work was centered in Detroit where, in 1979, she accepted the position of Public Relations Coordinator for the Capuchin Community Center. The principal ministry of the Center was the operation of a soup kitchen. Helen sought contributions for the support of this ministry by giving talks and communicating with parishes and groups in the Detroit area regarding the needs of the Center.

In the latter part of 1985 Helen began caring for her mother in Allendale, Michigan. She continued in this ministry until her mother's death in February of 1990, after which she began a period of service at Victory Noll.

Since Helen wished to leave her body to medical research; there was no funeral. Members of her Intentional Community and her Support Group planned a Vigil Service which was held on Thursday evening, January 14. Helen had been an active participant in the planning.

As Coordinator of the OLV Community, Helen's friendly, outgoing personality and sense of humor endeared her to many, including people in the wider Huntington area. Those present at the Vigil Service were encouraged to tell of ways in which Helen had touched their lives. Space prevents me from being able to relate the many thoughts that were expressed; however, I would like to mention a few. In 1954, when Helen entered Victory Noll, Sister Florentine was in charge of Postulants. She found Helen to be a very "fun-loving" person – an asset to a group of young women, many of whom were away from home for the first time. In addition, Sister Florentine found her to be a person full of loving kindness – a quality that survives death! Others spoke of Helen's gentleness, love of nature, love of freedom for the individual, playfulness (she juggled raw! eggs) and mischievousness.

At the Vigil Service Sister Beatrice Haines told of the time that she and several others arranged to meet Helen in the Public Welfare Building in Detroit, where she worked. They arrived, but Helen deliberately delayed seeing them. She wanted the Sisters to experience what some of the people go through in being "pushed around" and told to keep moving instead of "loitering." Akin to that, my first real acquaintance with Helen was a time when several Sisters and I had occasion to be in Detroit when Helen worked for the Capuchin Community Center. We called on her and suggested that we would like to take her to some nice little place for lunch. She told us that she knew just the place, and that we would love the ambience. As you may have guessed, we found ourselves taking trays and standing in line at the soup kitchen! Another attempt at acculturation.

On Friday, January 16, a Memorial Liturgy was offered by Father Thomas Fahey. Members of Helen's family and friends joined us for this celebration. Sister Rita Musante gave a very thought-provoking homily. I will quote a few lines:

"Un conventional – uncomfortable – lovingly disturbing – gently challenging: these are some of the words I think of when I think of Helen – and Jesus! Their questions and statements often make me uncomfortable, disturbed – and challenged.

In the Gospel chosen by Helen, we hear Jesus, and Helen, proclaim: whenever you do, or neglect to do, anything for, or against, one of my least sisters or brothers, you do, or neglect to do it for ME! Isn't this an uncomfortable statement?

John of the Cross sums it up simply by saying: "In the evening of life, we will be judged by love!"

We wish to extend our sympathies to the Danenberg family. We miss Helen but we take comfort in the knowledge that she will intercede for us. The final verse of the Veni Sancte Spiritus expresses our prayer for her:

"Give her virtue's sure reward, Give her Your salvation, Lord; give her joys that never end."

In the peace of Christ,

*Sister Elizabeth Ann*

Sister Elizabeth Ann Evans, OLVM