



Eulogy of Sister Helen Thompson, BVM (St. George)
Marian Hall Chapel, Sept. 10, 2018

Good afternoon and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Helen Thompson.

Helen Elizabeth Thompson was born on Jan. 19, 1933, in San Francisco, Calif. She was the first child of Howard and Gertrude Riordan Thompson and big sister to her brother George. Her parents were teachers who loved the outdoors. As soon as school was out the family was off enjoying camping, canoeing and skiing.

Because her mother taught in the public junior high, Helen transferred from the public school to Most Holy Redeemer in the seventh grade. While she did not care for her seventh grade teacher, she was greatly influenced by SM Incarnata Gephart. In her words: "Salvation came because I got sent downstairs to SM Incarnata's second grade room to do the blackboards. I can say that washing the blackboards in the second grade [room] is probably a very real reason I am [a BVM] today."

Helen entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1951, and received the name St. George upon her reception on Aug. 15, 1951. She professed first vows on Aug. 15, 1953, and lived 67 years as a BVM. She began her vowed life as a junior high teacher at St. Gertrude in Chicago and then St. Leo in San Jose, Calif. Reflecting on those early years, Helen commented, "Not having had a very religious childhood, I learned a lot during these first eight years of religious life."

Soon Helen's life took a different path. She returned to college full time and earned a Bachelor's degree with a history major and a theology/philosophy minor from Mundelein College. She immediately went on to earn an MA and a PhD in education from the University of Chicago. "I was called to be a student," Helen remarked, "I mean a serious student with nothing to entertain or distract me! I learned a lot including how [a computer] made short shrift of data – once you wrote a program that worked!"

Helen returned to Mundelein to co-direct Upward Bound, a program that provided fundamental support to disadvantaged high school students with intellectual potential. Unique communities formed as faculty, tutors, counselors and students collaborated in new and exciting ways, especially during trips to places like Washington, D.C and the Rocky Mountains. Helen later served as academic dean at Clarke University for nine years.

A year after celebrating her silver jubilee, Helen left Clarke and began what she called "the journey inward." In her own words, "I spent a lot of time wandering in deserts – beautiful ones like Sedona and Death Valley, desolate places like Spirit Lake after Mount St. Helens erupted, and mostly in the desert places of my own soul. My quest was simply this: How could my life be more creative, whole and holy than it had been during the first half?"

Helen returned to school and earned a Master of Arts in Theology with a major in spirituality from the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., in 1980. During this time, she also spent two summers and their winters working with a group of religious sisters in Rome and in South Africa during the days of apartheid, calling the experience "transformative." Afterwards she served as an adjunct faculty consultant at the Jesuit School of Theology and later worked as a freelance organizational consultant. In 1994, she joined the faculty at the School

of Applied Theology, a member of the Graduate Theological Union noted for individually designed sabbatical programs that integrate theology, ministry, spirituality, and psychology.

Helen's interests and activities varied. She served as editor of the newsletter "Connecting BVMs West" for 13 years. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the southern United States in 2005, she was deployed as a Red Cross volunteer to Montgomery, Ala. In calmer times, she enjoyed knitting hats, listening to music, and participating in Tai Chi classes. She also inherited her mother's artistic ability and several of her paintings are on display here at Mount Carmel.

"Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and found by those who seek her" (Wisdom 6:12). Helen lived her adult life as a wisdom seeker. Approaching her golden jubilee, she wrote, "I am grateful for all that has been; the first half for learning all the things I needed to transform, and for the happiness I've known during the second half." The passage from Wisdom continues, "[The] one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care" (Wisdom 6:15). Vigilant on her quest to the end, Helen now lives in the presence of perfect Wisdom, perfect Love.