

## SISTER HELENE PATEFIELD

1924 – 1978



The 1960s brought many changes to the American Province. Within the course of around ten years, vocations rose to an all-time high down to only a few entering.

Our hospitals were growing and expanding and new members were receiving quality education for their future ministry as nurses and teachers. Vatican II, the Sister Formation Movement and the Provincial Chapters of 1965 and 1968 were all calls for renewal in the Church and in Religious Life. Change was all around when Sister Helene Patefield was appointed Provincial on February 3, 1969.

Marjorie Patefield was born April 12, 1924, in Wausau, Wisconsin. She was 22 years old when she entered the Congregation in Milwaukee and received the name of Sister Helene. After receiving a B.S. in Business Administration from Marquette University, she served as an accountant at Divine Savior Hospital, Portage, and the financial controller at St. Mary's Hospital, Wausau. She also served as Provincial Treasurer from 1965-1969. She was exactly the right person to be serving in this capacity at the time of our financial crisis.

As Sister Helene was busy working with the financial needs of our hospitals, other things were changing in the Province as well. Our hospitals needed renovations and our Motherhouse was overcrowded. In 1963, the Province was encouraged to work with Victor Orsinger, a real estate investor with Parkwood, to assist us with our financial needs. Orsinger offered to refinance the indebtedness of the Province as well as provide a source for borrowing funds for our building projects. By 1964, Orsinger's Parkwood enterprise was already on the verge of collapsing and was being investigated by the Securities and Exchange Commission. There was no way any of the province's money could be released. We as a Province are forever grateful to Sister Helene for her outstanding leadership during this trying period. God was surely looking out for us when Sister Helene served us both as Provincial Treasurer and then as Provincial.

The miracle of the financial crisis is that our Province stayed strong and avoided bankruptcy. Sister Margaret Shekleton writes in *Bending in Season*: "Literally hundreds of hours of meetings were devoted to finding a solution to the financial impasse. Through Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee, the Sisters refinanced their entire debt, mortgaging all the Institutions. During this time, the Province was ably led by Sister Helene Patefield, a certified public accountant who was now the Provincial Treasurer." Sister Margaret Shekleton, the Provincial at the time, saw the real need to establish a Lay Advisory Board to assist the Province in financial matters. As Treasurer, Sister Helene worked tirelessly with this Board. It is due to them and to the careful work of the Province's financial consultant, Dr. Frank Probst, that by 1973, the Province was able to pay off the entire debt owed to the lending firms. As a result of our financial crisis, transparency with our financial matters became the norm.

Under the leadership of Sister Helene, many other important events took place:

- The establishment of the Administrative Council. This committee system provided a forum for the Sisters to voice their concerns, their ideas and suggestions for the province.
- Salvatorian House of Studies on the Marquette campus closed in 1969
- Merger of St. Mary's Hospital and Wausau Hospital February 4, 1970
- The affiliation of Divine Savior High School and Holy Angels Academy to become DSHA March 13, 1970.
- In the Chapter of 1971, the American Province was calling for greater decentralization, Team Government and more religious renewal. This effort took a tremendous amount of work on meetings and work on her part.

Toward the end of her term as Provincial Superior, it was discovered that Sister Helene had multiple myeloma. From 1972 until the time of her death she was a patient at St. Mary's Nursing Home. During these years she was called to the apostolate of suffering. Much of her time was now spent in prayer and reflection. She continued to develop her interest in the renewal, the hopes and struggles within the Church, her Salvatorian community and society.

Sister Helene served God's people in her health, in her suffering, and in her death through science and research. She donated her body to the Medical College of Wisconsin in her desire to help others through medical research. She died on August 15, 1978, at the age of 54, in the 32<sup>nd</sup> year of Religious Profession. We are grateful to Sister Helene for her leadership and sharing her gifts and talents.

