



**Sister Helen Zettel (formerly Sister Claretta)
December 22, 1921 – February 5, 2019**

Sister Helen Zettel died at Notre Dame Convent, Waterdown, Ontario on February 5, 2019 at age 97 in her 79th year as a School Sister of Notre Dame.

Born on December 22, 1921 Helen referred to herself as a “cherished God-sent Christmas gift” for her parents William and Clara (Martin) Zettel. St. Boniface church and school were central to the Catholic village of Maryhill where Helen lived. She knew the SSNDs not only as teachers, but she had three SSND aunts, Sisters Josephine, Augustine and Louise Martin. From an early age Helen also felt drawn to be a sister. After completing Gr.10 at St. Boniface School, Helen entered the candidature in Waterdown in 1936. She was received as Novice Mary Claretta in 1939 and professed her vows the following year.

Upon graduation from Hamilton Teachers’ College, Sister Helen taught in Hamilton at Holy Family and St. Helen Schools, in Kitchener at St. Anne and St. Aloysius Schools, in Welland at St. Kevin School, and in Oakville at St. Mary School, where she was also principal.

On August 22, 1961 Sister Helen was one of four SSND Canadian pioneers to depart for La Paz, Bolivia. For the next six years she was director of St. Andrew School. She supported the people in rural communities in their struggle for justice and improved health and living conditions.

In 1967 Sister Helen moved to Comas, Peru, where she was involved in adult education and family catechesis. She established an academy for women teaching them to read, to cook and to sew. Also, she encouraged the women to demand respect for themselves and to pursue their rights from civil authorities. Sister Helen accompanied them in their marches for water to be piped into their homes.

While in Lima she and members of her community were invited to attend courses by Gustavo Gutierrez at the Catholic University of Lima. These courses included Liberation Theology, Marxism and Christianity, Christology and other related studies.

Basic Christian communities were formed to study the documents from Vatican II which enabled Sister Helen to incorporate her learnings in family catechesis.

While she was in Peru, the community was instrumental in promoting the first Latin American Conference of SSNDs. The sisters in Chile hosted the first gathering in 1970.

On her return to Canada in 1975 Sister Helen studied at Divine Word Centre in London Ontario. From 1976 to 1985 Sister Helen lived in Toronto where she ministered to the Hispanic community.

She co-facilitated the Canadian Urban Training Program, an ecumenical program for university students interested in being involved in social action to build a more just and humane society. The objective of the course was to develop the ability to analyze critical social issues and to understand how power structures and systems effect communities.

In January 1985 Sister Helen was called back to Peru to assist in pastoral ministry in Santiago Parish, Lima, and in 1990, to serve in Oscar Romero Parish in Canto Grande, Lima. Here she guided the senior citizens in reflecting on the readings for the Sunday liturgies.

In the summer of 1999 Sister Helen transitioned from her missionary endeavours in South America to Ontario. She lived in Waterloo and later moved to Waterdown in 2005. Her concern for the Hispanic peoples continued locally and abroad.

The words from Psalm 116 aptly describe Sister Helen, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful."

Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Helen was celebrated on February 9 at Notre Dame Convent, Waterdown. The presider was Rev. Wayne Lobsinger, Episcopal Vicar for Consecrated Life. Concelebrant and homilist was Rev. Pablito Labado, Chaplain. She is survived by her sister Noreen Scherrer.