



## **Helen Mary Harding, rsm**

23 February 1945 – 8 April 2024

Remembrance Card: An excellent woman - who can find her?

Proverbs 31:10

Motto on ring: Believe and Trust

Today we gather here in St. Teresa's Parish Church to celebrate life and the hope of resurrection. We gather as a community, the people of God - all of us on a journey, pilgrims on earth. One has gone from our midst. We celebrate the life of Sister Helen Harding, Sister of Mercy, daughter, sister, aunt, colleague and friend. In this time of Easter we celebrate her transformation through death into new life.

Helen Mary Harding was born and grew up in St. John's. Her parents were Gerald Harding and Geraldine Mulcahy of Bay Bulls. In her young years Helen's family moved "way outside" of St. John's to Kenmount Road, the beginning of the TransCanada Highway, where her father had a large dairy farm, beginning with six calves.

Having completed high school Helen decided that she would be a teacher. She completed her first year at Memorial University before she joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1962. She took the religious name Sr. Mary Richardine after her little brother Richard who was one year old when she left home. Christine was born after Helen entered the convent so, dear Christine, Helen might have chosen her new baby sister's name for her religious name!

Helen was an independent and strong woman. Being the eldest girl of in a family of nine she developed leadership skills and responsibility. All of her life, Helen was a leader, an administrator, an organizer. She was very creative, very gentle and patient. She was calm and cool and took charge when necessary. She was a deeply faithfilled and prayerful woman. As a postulant Helen taught school at Mercy College, Military Road. After her two-year novitiate she launched out into her teaching career. In those early years while teaching in the daytime Helen did night classes at Memorial University. She obtained her BA (Ed.) in 1972 and a BA (Math) 1977. From 1965 – 69 Helen taught elementary school in St. John's, Marystown, and Curling. Using her personal and professional giftedness she served as Principal from 1970 – 1978 in Curling, Marystown and St. John's. Then Helen had a year of study at Boston College where she completed a MA in education.

With her MA in hand Helen was ready to take on leadership at Holy Heart of Mary Regional High School, a very large girls high school in St. John's. She served there as vice-principal, assistant principal and principal during the next eight years. In those years she also served on the Board of Governors, St. Clare's Mercy Hospital. After a year of study at OISE in Ontario in 1987 Helen returned as principal of the high school in St. George's for five years. Then she was elected to the leadership team of the Sisters of Mercy serving as team member for eight years and then as Leader for another eight years. For some of that period she served as Treasurer General for the Congregation. Finally at the age of 64 Helen had sabbatical time during which she travelled, participated in renewal programs in England and in Berkley, California. When she came back home she graciously accepted a position in mission effectiveness at St. Patrick's Mercy Home as well as other commitments in congregational ministry.

The motto on Helen's profession ring is "Believe and Trust". Helen's life of commitment and steadfastness show that she practiced those values. In 2014 Helen was especially challenged to "believe and trust" when she had serious surgery for cancer and subsequent chemo therapy. When she recovered somewhat she was struck again with a recurrence of cancer, surgery and chemo therapy. Her overall physical health was severely compromised yet Helen returned to her ministry at St. Patrick's and continued committee work of the Congregation. Helen lived up to her motto with deep belief in God, in her community, family and friends and in herself. She trusted in God and others and lived as richly and as committed as she could despite her challenges. Helen made her daily journey in life with calm resolve, with belief and trust in God, in herself and in others. A Scripture quote that was chosen for the remembrance card describes a very capable, generous, creative, caring woman- a woman who excelled in her duties, responsibilities and outreach to others. That is Helen Mary Harding- a woman of excellence – we have found!

We are grateful to Helen for her life and example as a follower of Jesus, of Catherine McAuley and of so many women and men of mercy with whom she lived and worked, including her aunt, one of our sisters, Sr. Mary Nolasco. We are grateful for her gifts of nature, her deep faith and trust. We thank her for her perseverance and strength against so many demands in her personal, professional and religious life. We thank her for her good example of courage in suffering and limitation. We especially thank her beloved family members, the Sisters of Mercy and close friends, especially Judy Gillam, who sustained her and encouraged

her and sometimes pushed her! We are grateful to the medical personnel at the hospitals, at McAuley Convent and at the Residence at Litledale for their care of Helen, especially during the past ten years.

In her latter years, Helen knew the journey through illness and dying that she must make. On Sunday past, even in her confusion she announced clearly that she had made up her own mind and that she wanted to die peacefully. We thank God that on April 8 she got her desired wish and God called her home - where she has no more pain or suffering and is now counted among the throng of holy ones.

Helen is now embraced in God's love and in the love of all who have gone before her. She no longer needs to "believe and trust", but she might nudge us to believe and trust as we continue our journey through life! Helen, enjoy your new life!