

# Helen, Our Beloved Sister-in-Service

Contributed by Carolyn Blum



**F**ondly remembered as an outstanding leader and proponent of leadership training in the LWML, Helen Gienapp, LWML President from 1979–1983, passed into the arms of Jesus on February 28, 2013.

Helen's skills were already recognized in her high school when she was elected class president. Helen used her leadership gifts in service to the LWML as local, zone, and LWML Michigan District President in the mid-1960s; Chairman of the Christian Leadership Training Committee in the early 1970s; and First Vice-President of the LWML in 1975.

Even after serving as LWML President, Helen continued her service, as Chairman of the *Discipling Woman to Woman* Program from 1983–1985, a member of the Concordia (Ann Arbor) Foundation Board of Directors and the English District Board of Directors, and Michigan coordinator for the American Bible Society.

Under her direction, the Christian Leadership Training Committee (the forerunner of the current Leader Development Committee) was begun, with Helen writing much of the material herself. The first LWML computer was purchased during her tenure. Helen was also the first LWML president to hold a full-time job outside the home; she was executive assistant to the president of the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce for the first two years of her presidency. When a new Chamber leader was hired, he was concerned with Helen's heavy LWML duties and travel schedule, so he gave her a choice: retain your job, or continue with LWML. Helen chose the LWML!

Alberta Barnes, who served as LWML Secretary and Chairman of LWML Mission Projects during Helen's term as LWML President, recalls that through Helen's mentoring she was privileged to be chosen as the next LWML president (1983–1987). "We were elected as district presidents in 1964, and served together on the LWML Board of Directors for four years," Alberta related.

"Helen's encouragement prompted me and many other women to develop their leadership skills to serve the Lord with gladness."

The whole family was involved with LWML, including her mother, Dorothea Fischer, who attended events with Helen. Helen's late husband, Rev. Walter Gienapp, would arrive home before Helen and organize her correspondence so she could more easily type her replies each evening. Helen's daughter, Karen Soeken, served as LWML Chesapeake District President; Helen's granddaughter, Elizabeth, served as her page at the 1983 convention.

Helen will be remembered for her ability to focus wholeheartedly on a conversation, her quick wit, her meticulous attention to correct grammar and spelling, and her poise under pressure. She is renowned for bouncing back quickly to lead the next day's proceedings after falling off the stage and breaking her arm during a Board of Directors meeting. The ultimate "balcony person," Helen encouraged from the side and rejoiced in the accomplishments of others.

Service to the Lord was first in her life. Whether through her membership in the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, being chosen as Citizen of the Year in her hometown of Ferndale, Michigan, or traveling on foreign mission trips with MOST Ministries when she was 75 years old, she radiated Jesus' love to all she met. Her last act of public service was four days before her death at age 91: She was scheduled to serve as lay reader during her congregation's worship service.

*Come to me ... and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

## Tributes

from LWML Presidents

**"Helen was an amazing woman. The LWML has been greatly blessed through her faithful service to our Lord."**

Kay Kreklau (Current LWML President)

**"A great mentor."**

Alberta Barnes (1983–1987)

**"Served the Lord with her whole being."**

Betty Duda (1987–1991)

**"Open to new ideas."**

Ida Mall (1991–1995)

**"Encouraged women to develop their leadership gifts."**

Gloria Edwards (1995–1999)

**"Extremely intelligent."**

Virginia Von Seggern (1999–2003)

**"Joyfully served God's people."**

Linda Reiser (2003–2007)

**"Her sparkling eyes let the love of Jesus shine through."**

Janice Wendorf (2007–2011)