

Sister Helen Lee Berner, O.S.F. (Ethelburge)



Born: September 1, 1900
Parents: James and Nellie Lee (Roth) Berner
Entered from: St. Clement, Chicago, IL
Postulancy: October 4, 1919
Novitiate: August 12, 1920
Profession: August 12, 1922
Died: Saturday, December 21, 1996 at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home at approximately 1:15 p.m.

Ministry:

1922 - 25 St. Mary, Columbus, OH, Grades 2, 3, 6
 1925 - 28 St. Peter, Mansfield, OH, Grade 6
 1928 - 29 St. Bernard, Joliet, IL, Grades 4, 5, 6
 1929 - 31 St. Joseph, Freeport, IL, Grades 5, 6
 1931 - 32 Sacred Heart, Hubbard Woods, IL, Grade 6
 1932 - 33 Most Pure Heart of Mary, Shelby, OH, Grades 5, 6
 1933 - 46 Sacred Heart (Englewood), Chicago, IL, Commercial High School, Religion, Latin, Algebra, Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping
 1946 - 52 St. Peter, Mansfield, OH, Commercial High School, Religion, Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping
 1952 - 53 St. Procopius, Chicago, IL, Commercial High School, Religion, Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping
 1953 - 62 St. Clement, Chicago, IL, High School, Religion, Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping
 1962 - 63 St. Francis de Sales, Chicago, IL, High School, Secretarial classes, Typing, Shorthand
 1963 - 64 St. Mary High School, Columbus, OH, Secretarial classes, Typing, Shorthand
 1964 - 66 Bishop Ready High School, Columbus, OH, Typing, Bookkeeping, Shorthand
 1966 - 68 St. Francis Academy, Joliet, IL, Typing, Shorthand
 1968 - 76 St. Francis Convent, Joliet, IL, Secretarial assistance to the President
 1976 - 77 St. Francis Convent, Community Ministry
 1977 - 79 St. Michael, Sigel, IL, School Secretary
 1979 - 83 St. Francis Convent, Joliet, IL, Retired
 1983 - 96 Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL, Retired

Wake: Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL, Monday, December 23, 1996
 2-7:00 p.m. with a prayer service at 4:30 p.m.
Mass of Christian Burial: Our Lady of Angels, Joliet, IL, Monday, December 23, 1996, 7 p.m.
Burial: Tuesday, December 24, 1996 leaving Our Lady of Angels 9:30 a.m.
 to Resurrection Cemetery, Romeoville, IL, S8-L352-G9
Survived by: her sister Ruth Garvey, and many nieces and nephews

*For those who have been faithful, O Lord,
life is not ended, but merely changed.*

Sister Helen Lee Berner was born in Baltimore, Maryland on September 1, 1900 to James and Nellie Lee Berner. Her family moved to Chicago when Helen was a child. Helen attended parochial schools and graduated from the commercial course at St. Clement's High School on June 26, 1918.

On October 4, 1919, on the feast of St. Francis, Helen Lee became a postulant with the Joliet Franciscans. At her reception into the Novitiate, she was given the name Sister Ethelburga (later changed to Ethelburge), and still later, she resumed her Baptismal name of Helen Lee.

Sister Helen Lee began her teaching ministry as an elementary teacher, staying in that ministry in Illinois and Ohio for twelve years. In 1933, Sister Helen Lee began her long ministry as a high school commercial teacher, which lasted until 1968. While continuing her teaching, Sister Helen Lee also continued to be a student, earning her Bachelor of Arts Degree from DePaul University in Chicago in 1936 with a Latin major. In 1949, DePaul University granted Sister Helen Lee a Master's Degree. Her thesis topic for her major field of education was, "Release Time for Public School Instruction."

Sister Helen Lee lived her life with a spirit of determination and authority. It was clear to all what she thought and felt. Sister Helen Lee spoke often of her family and felt their support in her own life. She valued the Catholic values her parents had nurtured in her. Her own life of prayer grew from them and from her Franciscan formation within the Congregation. Mother Cabrini was one of her special saints, for as a child she had met Mother Cabrini in Chicago.

During the summer months of her active life Sister Helen Lee could often be found at one of the mission houses, helping with the typing and the cooking. Often she was with her good friend Sister Ida Pfeffer trying to help in any way she could. Helen Lee was also quite gifted in crocheting. Many an afghan she made still helps to ward off the chill on cold nights.

After retiring from teaching, Sister Helen Lee continued to use her commercial skills as a clerical assistant for the Congregation President. She also served as a school secretary in Sigel, Illinois and helped out at St. Stephen's in Streator, Illinois.

In 1983, Sister Helen Lee came to Our Lady of Angels. It was there that she recently suffered a fall, breaking her hip. Her weakened condition did not offer the strength to survive that last setback. As the days of Advent drew to a close, the refrain of "Come, Lord Jesus", was often sung and prayed as the Sisters gathered with her. Early Saturday afternoon on December 21, 1996, Sister Helen Lee quietly and peacefully went to her God. It was the birthday of her good friend Sister Ida. If cooking or typing are needed in the heavenly mansion, Sister Helen Lee will be lending a helping hand.

Sister Helen Lee, we thank you for your long life with us, your family, and your Franciscan Sisters. Thank you for the many ways you sought to serve others. Pray for us as you live with Jesus and all the angels and saints in heaven forever. Amen. Alleluia.

