Sister Helen Walsh, known also as Sister Rose Michaeleen, was born in Chicago on June 15, 1920. She was the second oldest of six children born to William and Rosemary (O’Sullivan) Walsh.

Her parents were married at St. Bride Church on Thanksgiving Day in 1917. Because her dad was serving in the army, the couple walked out of church beneath an arch of soldier’s swords in military style. When the war ended, her father returned to his law practice.

In her autobiography, Sister Helen described the arrival of her five siblings and the gifts of her parents.

*The first child, Rosemary, was born on November 1, 1918, in a military hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan. Soon the war ended and the family moved to Port Huron, my father’s birthplace. When I was expected, my father took my mother back to Chicago, where he felt the best doctors could be had. However because of the speed of my arrival, a hospital intern was in charge and I arrived late on Sunday night June 15, 1920, at South Shore Hospital. When I was four, my brother Billie was born and the story was later told that I asked my mother if she could return him get a baby that didn’t cry so much. My last three siblings, Nan, Mary Jo and Joe, were born in Port Huron and all were surrounded by doting relatives.*

*My father and mother had different gifts with which they challenged us to be our very best. Mother encouraged my love for sewing and gardening. Dad introduced each of us children to many sports. Since we had the blessing of a cottage on Lake Huron, we swam, played tennis and golf and later, Dad took us horseback riding.*

After finishing grade school at St. Joseph in Port Huron, Helen attended St. Joseph Academy. Her parents used boarding school as a reward for being good both at home and at school. In fact, Sister Helen wrote, “I felt only a little loneliness when I left home since Rosemary was also at the Academy.”

Sister Helen graduated in June 1939 and in September began her undergraduate studies at Marygrove College in Detroit. The following year, she transferred to the University of Michigan and in 1943 she earned a bachelor’s degree in English. She entered the postulate on June 28, 1944, at the age of twenty-four. In her autobiography, Sister Helen described her first assignment in Adrian.

*Just before the fall semester began, I was assigned to drive Mother Gerald on her visitation of the Michigan convents in the north: Lansing, Bad Axe, Alpena, Midland and then into the Upper Peninsula where roads were long between missions. When we returned I was assigned to take two education courses and to teach part-time at the Academy. Sister Andrew Marie guided me into her seventh and eighth-grade history and handwriting classes.*
Following profession on January 5, 1946, Sister Helen was assigned to teach at St. Columbanus in Chicago. This was the beginning of her twenty-four years ministering primarily in Midwest elementary schools. In two of these schools – St. Dominic in Detroit and St. Mary in Defiance, Ohio – she also served as principal. In her autobiography, Sister Helen wrote about her years at St. Dominic.

> Six years of caring for desperately poor families was hard but three years watching the new huge housing project go up in Detroit, with its fourteen buildings, seven stories high, crowding thousands of new residents into our area, was depressing. Later it caused me to write a term paper at Wayne State University on the need for “Playgrounds not Prisons.” The future was obviously bleak for many of these children whom I truly loved.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Sister Helen earned two degrees: a master’s in English from Loyola University in Chicago in 1951 and a master’s special education from Wayne State University in Detroit in 1963. Five years later she was assigned to teach for three years in Barry College’s Special Education Program. But, as Sister Helen wrote, “change was in the wind and I welcomed the freedom to be less hemmed-in by rules and the ability to make my own decision – to risk and to choose my own ministries.”

From 1971 to 1980, Sister Helen chose to minister in two social service agencies. During the first five years, she served as Director of Volunteers at Catholic Charities in Toledo, where she arranged field experiences for high school students – for example, the students visited local jails.

In 1976, she began her four-year ministry with the Detroit Team for Justice. Part of this ministry was in the Wayne County Jail, which required follow-up services for individuals preparing to re-enter society. Sister Helen also worked with the Michigan Women’s Prison in Plymouth. In 1979 this prison, along with its related services, was moved to Ypsilanti.

In her autobiography, Sister Helen wrote, “In 1980 I needed to update my theology.” She decided to do this at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California, and she continued to live in the Bay Area for the next twenty-two years. After studying applied theology for nine months in Berkeley, she ministered in adult education at Catholic Charities in Oakland for nine months. Then she was hired at Mills College in Oakland to teach courses in their Upward Bound Program. She also served for four years as Director of Religious Education for St. Anselm Parish in San Anselmo, north of San Francisco.

In 1987, Sister Helen’s California ministries were interrupted temporarily when she returned to Adrian to serve for three years as Director of Activities at Maria Health Care Center. When she returned to California she began serving as a caregiver and companion for seniors living alone in the Monterey Bay area.

Sister Helen retired in 1997 and lived at Dominican Oaks, the congregate living facility located near Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz. In her autobiography, she wrote:
In December 2001, I moved to Dominican Oaks in Santa Cruz, where community living with eight of our sisters was good. Since we were unable to go to Adrian during the 125th Anniversary [of the Congregation] we seized the opportunity to teach the residents some of the history of the Congregation. They enjoyed our presentations and we were able to share our new vision of religious and spiritual values.

Sister Helen’s brother Joe and his family lived in the area and she enjoyed frequent visits with family and friends during her retirement years.

Sister Maria Goretti Browne, Vicaress of the Adrian Dominican Vicariate, shared the following during the wake service.

*Helen made sure she was educated in the Congregation’s history as well as in the teachings of the Church and she shared these learnings whenever and wherever she could. After twenty-three years in California, Helen felt a need to return home to Adrian, which she did in 2010.*

Sister Helen returned to Adrian because of failing health. She died on May 10, 2017, at the age of ninety-seven and in the seventy-second year of her religious profession.

The following are excerpts from Sister Mary Keefe’s homily.

> The readings\(^1\) Helen chose remind us of what it means to follow the way of Jesus. And Helen is a shining example of someone who lived out these readings in service to others. Today’s passage from Isaiah speaks of the Spirit of the Lord choosing us to be the ones who are to bring good news to the afflicted. We are to bind up the brokenhearted. We are to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners. We are to comfort all who mourn.

> In today’s Gospel Jesus gives us the Beatitudes. Jesus repudiates the values of wealth, status, and what people have achieved through self-assertion and acting as if they are superior to others. For Jesus, God’s kingdom is where we all are healed of whatever keeps us from being the best person we can be. God’s kingdom is where all are forgiven, completely. God’s kingdom is where life is restored to its fullest. God’s kingdom is where suffering ends.

> Helen worked tirelessly to build up the kingdom of God by responding in whatever way she could, to those in need. She was joyful in her care and in her concern for everyone. She was a blessing for all of us. Let us pray that we may be as joyful and as generous as Helen.

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\(^1\) Isaiah 61:1-8, Matthew 5:3
RIGHT: Celebrating their 25th in Florida in 1971 are, from left, Sisters Helen Walsh, Mary J. Beaubien, and Barbara Gass.

LEFT: From left, Rosemary and Helen Walsh. RIGHT: Sister Helen, left, and Sister Claire, a Columban Sister, on one of the Boston Tea Party ships in Boston Harbor, 1976
RIGHT: Sister Helen with her parents, Reception Day 1945

LEFT: Sister Monica Kim, left, and Sister Helen with Sister Helen’s 50-year Jubilee cake

RIGHT: At Villa Sierra, California