

MARIAN RESIDENCE

1104 Toluca Avenue
ALLIANCE, NEBRASKA 69301

January 23, 1987

Dear Sisters, Relatives, and Friends,

Sister Helenita Langner slipped quietly away to God on the evening of January 19, 1987. She had been ill for at least ten years; during the last year her condition slowly grew worse until she was bedridden. The community gathered at her bedside Monday afternoon to recite the Rosary and sing the Salve Regina, and Sisters were present, praying, when she died.

Sister Helenita, Elizabeth Langner, was born in Gross Peterwitz, Germany, November 1, 1900. Her parents, Paul and Martha Schons Langner, had five sons and two daughters, of whom one brother and her younger sister Hedwig survive. Two brothers died as very young men. According to a newspaper clipping dated 1945, her priest brother Herbert was "dragged away" by Russian soldiers on Easter Tuesday when he tried to protect some women of his parish. Later he was tortured and killed in a concentration camp for organizing religious devotions. "He died a Martyr in Buchenwald", the article stated. Her brother Hans died last March.

Her surviving brother Gerhard wrote in a recent letter, "We rejoiced reading that she still loves to sing. She, as well as three brothers and her younger sister, all liked to sing in our father's choir of our church at home. He conducted a choir of many singers." Sister Helenita's love of music remained with her almost to the end. She would sing in chapel if someone found the hymn for her, and would sit smiling, tapping hands and feet, when the nurses played cassettes of religious music for her enjoyment.

Sister entered religion at Nonnenwerth in 1925, came to the United States as a novice in 1926, and professed vows at Stella Niagara in 1927. Her teaching career began at St. Vincent's Orphanage in Columbus, Ohio, but most of her more than forty years in elementary classrooms was spent between Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions in South Dakota. She felt at home in the country, and loved to take her Sioux students for long walks and to pick wild flowers. When her health failed she came to Alliance in 1976 and spent her remaining years here in retirement.

We think Sister Helenita would have enjoyed her own funeral. The theme of the Mass and the Office for the Dead which preceded it was the call of God. This meant not only the call to leave her home and country in her youth, but also to follow Him through long years of illness to the end. The comforting reading from Isaiah 49 was followed by the hymn "I Will Never Forget You, My People". Christ's words to Peter, "When You are older...another will lead you where you would rather not go" led to the hymn "Do You Really Love Me?". At the Offertory, the lovely voice of Agnes Kunzman, choir leader of our parish church, soared into the "Ave Maria".

The Mass was concelebrated in the Gerontology Center chapel by Father Bryan Ernest of our parish and Father Bernard Fagan, S.J., of St. Francis Mission. Father Fagan spoke of his warm memories of Sister Helenita, dating back forty years to his arrival at Holy Rosary Mission as a nervous Scholastic to begin his first year of teaching. Sisters from Denver, Colorado; Gering and O'Neill, Nebraska; Manderson, Hot Springs, and St. Francis, South Dakota were present for the services. She rests now with the other Franciscans in Calvary Cemetery. May she live in peace.

The Sisters at Marian Residence