

## Mary Felicitas Wekel, SP

Born on January 18, 1916 in Fife Lake, Saskatchewan, Helen Wekel first met the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul when she was 12 years old. She told one of the Sisters that she would like to teach orphans. She entered the congregation four years later on August 12, 1932. She made first profession on August 15, 1934 and took the name Sister Mary Felicitas.



Her first assignment as a professed sister fulfilled her childhood wish – she taught orphans at St. Mary’s of the Lake Orphanage in Kingston. In 1936 she was sent to Edmonton to complete her high school education. Although her dream was to be a teacher, she entered nursing school at the request of the Congregation. She graduated as an R.N. from Providence Hospital School of Nursing, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. In 1945 she earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Education from the University of Ottawa. She was then assigned to St. Mary’s Hospital in Montreal where she served as Director of Nursing from 1945 to 1955 and as Director of the School of Nursing from 1945 to 1971.

Teaching still played an important role in her life as she worked towards an education oriented method of teaching nurses, as opposed to the traditional training model. She continued her education and in 1954 received a Master of Nursing Education from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Sr. M. Felicitas held various positions in several nursing associations, and became the first religious to be President of the Canadian Nurses’ Association. In this capacity she visited every province in Canada, as well as Europe and Australia. Sister was instrumental in advocating for the shift from hospital nursing schools to nursing programs at educational institutions.

In 1971 she was elected a General Councilor of the Congregation. As Councilor, she served on the Boards of Directors of four health care institutions in Eastern Ontario and was a member of the Queen’s Sciences Complex, Kingston. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from Queen’s University in 1974 for her outstanding contributions to health care.

In 1977 Sister started a new career in spiritual direction and retreat work. She retired in 1994 and died 10 years later on June 24, 2004.

**LINKS:** [www.providence.ca](http://www.providence.ca)

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