

Building Bridges to Justice

October 2021

No matter where in the world Sister Barbara Ann (BA) Brigham has resided, she was drawn to live among the country's most marginalized people - in the villages, the slums, the neighborhoods with few resources. Trained as a medical technologist before entering MMS, her first mission assignment was at the Holy Family Hospital in New Delhi, India in 1966. When she was asked to help in the formation process for young women (novices) seeking to become MMS she was delighted when the decision was made to move the program from the sophisticated city of Pune to the rural town of Maner.

Maner is described as a “block” headquarters – a center for 100 villages, all small and all within walking distance and highly populated. Three mornings a week the Sisters and novices talked with people from different villages in the area; they would rush home to write notes and share their stories with each other in the afternoon. In the evenings Sr. BA would teach literacy in the villages. She treasured her time with the local people and enjoyed the diversity within the MMS community. She describes this time as totally different than anything they had ever experienced. The novices included indigenous women, Goan, Mangalorean and East Indian women. No one knew the culture in Maner so they were all learning how to live peacefully and productively with a new language and new customs, both locally and with each other.



Sister Barbara Ann in New Delhi, India, 1999

Having identified a new mission in the village of Neora, Sr. BA and two other MMS moved into one small room in a house with no bathroom facilities. The other two Sisters felt comfortable using the field with the neighbors, a section for men and a section for women where all the local gossip could be learned! Sr. BA recalls being teased by the neighborhood children as she walked to a neighbor's latrine. In Neora Sr. BA continued her literacy experience. She taught a young boy how to write his name. She shares, “It’s just four letters in Hindi: Puja. He was so thankful. I often wondered if he knew the meaning of his name....it means ‘worship’.”

After a life-threatening asthma attack, Sr. BA moved into the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia and worked in the vocation promotion department for North America. Seven years later, having taken Spanish classes, she moved to Peru where she believed she would, once again, be able to immerse herself in the local culture of the rural villages. She spent three years doing parish work near Lima, before moving to Pachacutec, a slum near Lima that is known there as a “pueblo joven,” or a “squatter’s town.” She and Sr. Maria Fernanda (Mafe) Ramirez, a Colombian pediatrician who was an MMS candidate at the time and is now a member of the Society Leadership Team, provided health education to the mothers running feeding programs or “community kitchens” for children, focusing on the causes and cures of the health problems their children encountered.

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The Peruvian government's Ministry for Women and Social Development had opened a center in Pachacutec to combat family violence and sexual abuse. Sr. BA became involved with the center, lighting her passion for non-violent approaches to conflict. She loved living and working with the people of Pachacutec and was in the midst of setting up a place to live, when she suffered another serious asthma attack and had to return to the States.

Once again wanting to live among those made poor, she started a new MMS community in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia in May 2009. She became involved with the Alternatives to Violence Project, and continues to teach non-violent ways to confront the stresses of life both at New Jerusalem Now, an MMS program for those recovering from addiction, and at the State prison at Graterford, Pennsylvania. Harkening back to those early days in India, she teaches English as a second language, this time to immigrants from all over the world. She is active at the local Visitation Community Center in Kensington where in addition to teaching English she assists in food distribution and programs for women. Sr. BA says she feels most enlivened and peaceful when she is living and working close with those who "live on the edges."



1 B.A.L - R: Sister BA, Associate Therese O'Connor, Sisters Jane Caspillo and Marisol Martinez take a break from working at the monthly family dinner provided for local residents at the Visitation Community Center in Kensington.

Please consider supporting the Medical Mission Sisters who seek to be a healing presence in body, mind and spirit. All over the world Sisters and Associates are serving in clinics and hospitals, schools and community centers, on the streets and in eco-spirituality centers. We seek to provide hope and to be a channel of God's grace.

WAYS TO GIVE

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Justice Priorities

In July 2021, a group of 20 North American Sisters and Associates convened for a week-long meeting to discuss a variety of issues, take up the recommendations of our membership, and hammer out decisions of priority, direction and governance for our unit.

One of the tasks of the group was to identify justice priorities for the next three years. Attending to justice has been a core value for Medical Mission Sisters since we started. Our Foundress, Anna Dengel said, “Our work is not charity. Our work is justice.” We believe that work for justice is sacred work, an integral aspect of our spirituality.

The group gathered in July enthusiastically approved the following justice priorities: climate change, racism, addictions, vaccine equity, incarceration, violence, food insecurity, mass migration and homelessness. These topics are not listed in order of priority; we believe they are interconnected and impact each other. However, we agreed that the issue having the greatest overall implication is climate change.

Sisters and Associates have been tending to these areas of priority, some for many years and others more recently. North Philly and Kensington neighborhoods are home to MMS seeking to provide hope and healing to those struggling with addiction, food insecurity, incarceration, and for those living without a home. Immigrants new to the United States are supported by Sisters in Philadelphia and Tucson, AZ. We have joined the Catholic Cares Coalition in raising awareness and funds to support vaccine equity in all countries.

Racism and violence are woven into the fabric of our daily lives as U.S. residents – we interact, make choices and decisions, perceive and render judgments from a societal construct framed by violence and racism. In response, MMS in the U.S. have committed ourselves to self-examination, honest conversation and personal as well as public education on how the insidious presence of racism and violence has shaped and continues to shape so much of our and our neighbors’ life experience.

In May 2021 MMS around the world participated in the launching of the Laudato Si Action Platform (LSAP), a world-wide effort initiated by Pope Francis to address climate change and care for the Earth. Laudato Si calls: “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (LS 139)

What If?

What if the day had finally come when all Earth realizes, sacred is made manifest in myriad shapes and sizes, while all creation hears a single song and harmonizes:

We are one! We are one!
From all that makes us different,
a single web is spun:
all inclusive, all is sacred. We are one.

What if we put aside the many forces that divide us, bringing to the forefront all the good that is inside us, gracefully embracing opportunities denied us:

We are one! We are one!
From all that makes us different,
a single web is spun:
all inclusive, all is sacred. We are one.

What if amid the chaos of a graced emancipation, we start anew and see it through beyond all expectation. What if, awash with inner peace, we rise in celebration:

We are one! We are one!
From all that makes us different,
a single web is spun:
all inclusive, all is sacred. We are one:
all inclusive, all is sacred. We are one.

Words and Music: Miriam Therese Winter
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EARTH DAY 2021

The MMS Manifesto for LSAP

We, Medical Mission Sisters, in continuing our journey to wholeness, are making a public commitment to make the transition to integral ecology by responding to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor; adoption of a simple lifestyle; ecological education; ecological spirituality; economic sustainability; with emphasis on community involvement and participatory action; and to journey with others in contributing to systemic change.



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The Medical Mission Sisters are an international Society of Sisters with over 600 vowed and associate members in 18 different countries. We were founded in 1925 by Dr. Anna Dengel, whose burning passion was to provide medical care for Muslim women in East India (Pakistan) who were dying in childbirth due to cultural gender constraints.

Over the past 95 years we have evolved beyond building hospitals and providing clinical medical care to a broader scope of service. Our commitment is to be a healing presence in the way that most meets the needs of our times. We envision a world where all people can live with dignity, where no one is in want and lives in harmony with the whole of creation, the community of life. We are women with great passion...for wholeness, for justice, for life.

Please visit our website at www.medicalmissionsisters.org to read more about who we are and what we are doing! You can also check out our Facebook page - Medical Mission Sisters and Associates!



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