

A STEADY PRESENCE

Medical Mission Sisters and Covid-19



A little girl, Pinky K, in North India, cooks for her family as her parents leave every morning to look for food.

Medical Mission Sisters and Associates (MMS) are deeply committed to our spiritual lives. We are reflective and prayerful and we also love to keep busy! So as Covid-19 continues to rage around the world, even as some of us are in quarantine, or our living and working spaces are locked down, we offer our prayers, and we also pursue tangible ways to attend to the needs of those around us.

Always, when there is a crisis those who have the least amount of resources are impacted the greatest. They have no reserves of cash, or time, or family wealth and connections.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Sister Dr. Maria Fernandez Ramirez, a member of our Society Leadership Team in London, has been a part of an ecumenical group discussing relevant topics related to Covid-19. She helped craft the group's joint statement to publicly support WHO in urging all leaders of governments and pharmaceutical corporations to do everything in their power to make Covid-19 vaccines a global public good...accessible, available, and equitably distributed.

Please read on for more stories of MMS responding to the pandemic around the world.



Women receiving food distributions in Hajipur, India, practice social distancing.



Sister Agustina Sonda Mase (R) visiting a blind reflexologist whose income is now unpredictable.



Associate Theresa O'Connor (center) stands with Danielle Ivins-Fishman (L) and Kathy LoPresti, at the Thea Bowman Love Yourself event.

Indonesia

Medical Mission Sisters live in four areas in Indonesia: Parepare, Jarkarta, Semarang and Solo. In 2020, factories and other companies either closed or reduced their number of employees and many people lost their jobs. Those with resources were able to develop alternative means of income such as making masks and soap, however, the very poor do not have the reserves to make this shift of employment. They are the rag pickers, scavengers, daily laborers, cobblers, tricycle/motorcycle taxi drivers and those with leprosy.

MMS have distributed packages of rice, sugar, cooking oil, coffee and tea to over 200 people. The children received small packets of bottled milk, jelly and chocolate wafers. Sisters provided masks to those who couldn't afford to purchase one.

United States

The Thea Bowman Women's Center in Philadelphia is reopening after Covid-19 precipitated a temporary closure. The beautifully renovated space offers a safe, warm building for the women of the streets of Kensington to shower, wash their clothes, share a meal and build a community.

The Center commemorates Thea Bowman, a Franciscan religious sister, teacher, and scholar who made a major contribution to ministering to her fellow African Americans. She said: "I'm content to do my little bit. Sometimes people think they have to do big things in order to make change. But if each one would light a candle we'd have a tremendous light."

MMS were involved with the planning for the original opening of the Center in 2019, and were enthusiastically volunteering and offering programs. Our commitment to the women continued despite the constraints...clothing, blankets and food were given out. MMS associate Theresa O'Connor started a GoFundMe in November, called food4friends, designating the women's center as one of three MMS projects to receive the funds raised. In February, Theresa and other MMS, along with center volunteers, held the first annual Love Yourself program at the Visitation Community Center, under which the Thea Bowman Women's Center is run. The event included a meditative art class led by MMS Associate, Sister Selena Wilson and a discussion on holistic health care facilitated by nursing students from a local college. Ten or more unhoused women shared stories, breakfast and lunch with nursing, pre-med, and film students, MMS Associates, volunteers and staff.

Philippines

Our Sisters in the Philippines received some generous support last fall. Belinda Siapno is the six-year-old daughter of Roselyn Siapno, a friend of the Medical Mission Sisters living in HEAL (Haven for Ecological Living) in Villasis, Pangasinan. Belinda had seen a picture of a relative giving out food packs to people. She asked her parents what was happening and was told that there were many people going hungry because of the coronavirus pandemic; many people couldn't go to work so they don't have food to eat.

Belinda wanted to help out but had no money, so she thought of selling her watercolor paintings, cooking and other ideas to raise funds. Eventually Belinda and her mom decided to bake banana bread, their regular activity on weekends when they have too many bananas in the house.

This project started August 1, 2020 with a goal to sell 100 loaves to raise funds to buy and donate rice. After one week with 182 orders, they raised the goal to 300 orders. After three weeks, there was enough funds to buy more than 60 sacks of 25-kg rice to be distributed to those in need.



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.

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Since the start of the pandemic last year, Medical Mission Sisters in Ang'iya, Kenya have been creatively responding to the needs in their neighborhood. They have manufactured hand sanitizer, made face masks, built handwashing stations and made emergency food packages. They sought out those in need of assistance medically or financially and have organized outreach education to respond to the COVID threat appropriately. Almost 150 widows, AIDS orphans and other individuals without resources received food, soap and PPE.

Above, Sister Agnes Chwala offers food to a neighborhood boy.



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