

# A Gathering of the Next Generation

It was in 1912 -- exactly a century ago -- when Anna Dengel learned there were women and children dying needlessly in what was then North India because, by custom, they couldn't go to male health providers for care. It was a life-altering discovery. Something deep within her knew she *had* to respond to this terrible injustice.

"I was fire and flame," she later wrote. As a woman, she was *convinced* she could make a difference in other women's lives. There truly was no question: she was being called to a brand new life.

Her personal story -- of medical school in Ireland during World War I, four years as the only doctor at a hospital in Rawalpindi, then founding the Medical Mission Sisters in Washington, D.C., in 1925 -- is one of deep concern for and commitment to those in need.

Over the past 87 years, close to 1,000 women from 24 different nations have followed Anna Dengel's lead. As Medical Mission Sisters trained in a wide variety of health and healing professions, they have helped *millions* of women, children and men in over 40 countries experience a level of health and wholeness in their lives. While many

of our Sisters today are aging and live as a healing presence in a less active way, "the fire and flame" continue to burn. They are still there in our older Sisters' minds, hearts and ministries. They provide inspiration and direction in our younger Sisters' lives, as well.

A special "Gathering of Newer Members" brought 12 of these younger women together in Philadelphia during the summer of 2012. Most of them had never met. Only a few had ever been out of their own nations. From missions in North, South and North East India; Germany; Venezuela; Ethiopia and the United States they came -- all women who had made Final Vows in our Community. They were eager to grow more in their own call to be a healing presence at the heart of our wounded world. They knew this was a special opportunity to experience intercultural and international living and, together, learn more of their Community's history, mission and vision -- and see their place in its future.

"The Gathering" became a blessed and enriching experience for all -- participants and resource persons alike. This issue of our *Medical Mission Sisters News* presents a special overview.



Participants in "The Gathering" and resource staff pose in front of the Liberty Bell.



**Sister Biya, center, with Sister Joyce Ross, RSM, and Sister Joan Barina, MMS, at the site of their parish ministry in Albany, New York.**

### *Experiencing Mission in North America*

With backgrounds in pastoral ministry, social work, nurse-midwifery, pharmacy, education, psychiatry and law, Medical Mission Sister-participants in the four-week “Gathering” arrived eager to learn about mission in North America. Each had shared her own special interests before arrival in North America. Visits in the United States tailored to these interests were arranged as much as possible. In addition, a number of group trips and experiences were planned.

German **Sister Anke Felicitas Boeckenfoerde**, a psychiatrist and psychotherapist working with persons with mental illness at a hospital outpatient clinic and also at the Caritas Clinic for the homeless in Frankfurt, visited with Sister Margaret McKenna at New Jerusalem Now. A residential addiction recovery community in North Philadelphia, nearly 50% of its population suffers from drug or alcohol addiction. Sister Anke was “very impressed by the holistic way Sister Margaret is doing her ministry.” Sister Anke also went to visit Livengrin, a treatment center for those with alcohol and drug addictions in Bensalem, Pennsylvania. She found these two experiences very helpful to her own ministry, noting that, “Building a relationship of trust is the first step in the treatment” of persons with these illnesses.

**Sister Anita Sangma**, a social worker in North East India, went to Boynton Beach, Florida, to experience “Women’s Circle,” a ministry started by Sister Lorraine Ryan to help empower low-income women. By providing assistance with education and career development, the women develop confidence, job skills

and the ability to gain financial stability to support themselves and their families.

Of her visits to Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, **Sister Ethel Dung Dung**, a nurse-midwife on the staff of Kurji Holy Family Hospital, Patna, India, and a member of our District North India Formation Team, said, “I never thought there were homeless people here.” It was a real “eye-opener” to see the needs in the United States.

Other Sisters visited Medical Mission Sisters and became acquainted with their lives and ministries in San Diego and Orange, California; Douglas, Arizona; Boston, Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; Albany, New York; the United Nations; Washington, D.C.; and other parts of Philadelphia. All remarked on how active the older Sisters were and how inspiring it was to see them so committed to different groups of people and their needs.

### *Learning Together*

The three-week formal program of “The Gathering” included special input from the Medical Mission Sisters’

*“The common purpose that binds us  
will keep the fire burning.”*



**One of the working groups of Sisters gathers during the three-week formal input sessions of “The Gathering.”**



Society Coordinator, Sister Agnes Lanfermann, and several other Sisters and Associates, as well as time to share each participant's own reality. Spirituality, multiculturalism, religious life, ecological living, the meaning of healing presence, and personal holistic health were just some of the topics presented and discussed. Prayer services and rituals highlighted the days and weeks, as did personal interaction with a great number of Sisters who are in North America today.

One very special Sunday was spent walking the "Sacred Ground" that Anna Dengel walked when she lived at the Medical Mission Sisters' Philadelphia headquarters, and seeing and hearing her talk about her Community in a video she recorded several years before her death.

"It was such an intimate moment of hearing Mother in her own voice, and feeling like she was speaking directly to each of us," says North American **Sister Katherine Baltazar**, of watching a DVD of Anna Dengel's interview on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Medical Mission Sisters. A psychiatric nurse who has worked in the Philadelphia area for several years, in September



**Top:** Sister Anita interacts with clients at "Women's Circle," in Boynton Beach, FL, founded by Sister Lorraine Ryan, MMS. **Lower left:** Sisters Rozlin and Dominica visit with Sister Juliana Matyi, MMS, in Orange, CA. **Lower right:** Participants express their oneness as Medical Mission Sisters.

*binds the Community together  
burning within us."*

Sister Katherine will begin a second period of ministry on one of the Indian Reservations in the West.

Other "Gathering" participants echoed Sister Katherine's comments. None had had the opportunity to meet Anna Dengel when she was alive, so this became a truly personal introduction for each one. Later in the afternoon, older Medical Mission Sisters shared some of their own personal memories and interactions with our Foundress. These became treasured moments of a truly "sacred" day.

### ***Passing the Torch***

It is these reminiscences and getting to know some of our older Medical Mission Sisters who did so very much to make the Community what it is today that all participants say they very specially take away with them. A pharmacist at Kurji Holy Family Hospital, **Sister Rozlin Kullu** says "I want to take the strength of the older Sisters home with me." **Sister Puspa Baxla**, who is a pharmacist on the staff of Attat Hospital in Attat, Ethiopia, adds about our older Medical Mission Sisters, "We are one. Their problems are our problems. We feel them in our hearts now."

The fire and flame that enveloped Anna Dengel 100 years ago was referred to and spoken about many times by participants in "The Gathering." A social worker in North East India, **Sister Biya Joseph Chathamkottu** speaks of them as the gifts that Mother Anna Dengel and all the other Sisters who followed her were now passing on to them. "They are giving their mission spirit, their energy, to us," she says. "The common purpose that binds the Community together," she adds "will keep the fire burning within us."



**Older Sisters give the next generation a special "mission sendoff."**

THANK YOU for supporting our healing mission through your donations and concern. Please pray for Medical Mission Sisters at work in: Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Philippines, United States, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, England, Holland, Germany, Belgium, and Italy.

# NEWS NEWS WORLD WIDE

## ■ UNITED STATES

During the summer of 2012, Medical Mission Sisters in North America celebrated 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of First Vows, as well as a First and Final Profession.

Sister Patricia Lowery, in mission in Fort Defiance, Arizona, and Sister Carol Francis, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, marked their Golden Jubilees. On August 15, the Diamond Jubilees of the following Medical Mission Sisters were celebrated: Sisters Bernadine Cupen, Nina Fritsch, Benet Gilland, Karen Gossman, Katharine Heidkamp, Carol Huss, Teresa Jaramillo, Mary Schild and Gertrude Provost.

In June in Philadelphia, Sister Christine Kancewick made her First Vows and Sister Abhaya Thekkan her Final Vows. We are blessed, indeed!

## ■ NAIROBI, KENYA

In Africa and around the world, Medical Mission Sisters also welcome Suzan Asinde, Mary Nassuuna, Roselyn Ninsiima and Scovia Kiconco into our Community. These four Ugandan women made their First Vows earlier this year.

## ■ NORTH EAST INDIA

The Governor of Meghalaya State in North East India has presented our Sister Rose

Kayathinkara with the 2012 Meghalaya State Award in recognition of her outstanding contributions to social service in the state. Sister founded the Mendipathar Multipurpose Co-operative that has helped thousands of people to work together to improve their lives. Sister Rose is pictured in January of our 2102 Medical Mission Sisters' Calendar.

■ **RENATE**, an organization that stands for "Religious in Europe against Trafficking and Prostitution," with which our Sister Dagmar Plum works, participated in a widespread trafficking awareness campaign during the Summer Olympics in London. Sister Dagmar also has been asked to share the sad situations of trafficked women with a Congregation of Sisters in Romania as a possible new mission for its members.

## ■ PATNA, INDIA

The Medical Mission Sisters and Sisters of Charity of Nazareth renewed their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as the sponsoring partners at Kurji Holy Family Hospital, Patna, India, for another seven years. The MoU was signed in the presence of many during a special prayer service on the Annunciation, the Feast Day of the Medical Mission Sisters.

## ■ BOTTROP, GERMANY

Sisters Gertrud Dederichs and Beate Harst, and Associate Karl-Heinz Heyer, are involved in a pastoral care project that extends the pastoral care given in the hospital to patients who are discharged and now at

home. People from different parishes are being trained how to offer "on-site" pastoral care to the sick. The mostly older patients being served benefit from the presence of a caring visit from someone they know. It is also a way to ensure that those whose health is fragile are doing well.

## ■ A NEW WAY TO GIVE

Medical Mission Sisters are pleased to announce that we are now able to accept gifts online through **PayPal**. If this is a convenient way for you to support our mission of healing presence, please go to: [www.medicalmissionsisters.org](http://www.medicalmissionsisters.org) and click on the "Be A Partner in Mission" page. Thank you!

## WILL POWER

The wonderful care and concern you have shown during your lifetime for those in need can live on in a special way through a gift made in your Will.

Legacies can be specified for a project or area of the world in which you have a special interest. Or they can be unspecified, to be used where they are needed most.

Any gift made to the Medical Mission Sisters to continue our mission of healing presence is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

God bless you always for your generosity!

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