

# Vibrant and Visionary

The missions started by Medical Mission Sisters (MMS) around the world are diverse as they are because each is initiated in response to a unit's local or regional economic, environmental and social situations.

Living out the legacy of our Founder, Anna Dengel, Sisters and Associates continue to be pioneers, identifying the need and moving into decisive action with compassion and hope. In some communities, MMS have been a healing presence for decades and in other areas new programs are just beginning as Sisters and Associates respond to emergent needs.

When Anna Dengel founded Medical Mission Sisters in 1925, her keen desire was to provide life-saving health care to women who were dying in childbirth because of cultural customs that prohibited male physicians to treat women. MMS went on to build hospitals in many countries around the world. Work at Holy Family, as the hospitals were known, generally also included training nurses, lab techs and other medical staff.

A mostly singular focus on healthcare for women and children in 1925 has broadened to include vital issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: systemic injustice, climate change, mega-migration, violence, and polarization. Inspired by our core value – our charism – of being a healing presence, MMS are developing new programs that address these contemporary signs of the times.

From the beginning, MMS have valued being international. Understanding, growing in, and becoming intercultural is a primary mission today emerging through working together across cultures and contexts: listening, learning, and making space for one another, valuing—all this offers an alternate way of being in a divided and divisive world. When we are present to this sacred space of vulnerability, trust, and commitment, our mission of healing is vital and transformative.

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*What does the world need?  
What is the work that needs doing?*

- 2022 MMS Chapter Report

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## Eco-Education and Healing Center



*Medical Mission Sisters in Tororo, Uganda provide training in mushroom cultivation to local farmers.*

MMS have been in Uganda since the early 1960's, when we built a hospital and nursing school in Fort Portal. Since that time, we have worked in different regions of Uganda, providing services that are a lifeline to many vulnerable people in remote, rural communities.

Uganda is one of the poorest countries in the world. Tororo lies in the eastern region, where eighty percent of the households depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Identifying and embracing sustainable ways of living and working for climate protection are imperative.

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The challenges in relation to environmental and climate protection are manifold: intensive land use and deforestation are leading to soil erosion, which is why agricultural productivity is falling. Water is becoming more and more polluted. The effects of global heating – as the biggest environmental threat in the region – are ever more dramatic: extreme weather events, prolonged droughts, floods and forest fires occur with higher frequency and intensity. All of Africa, and especially Uganda, struggle with the calamitous consequences.

MMS are taking a courageous stand against the climate emergency by seeking and implementing practical solutions in Tororo. Integrating the wisdom and experience of the indigenous farmers in the community, they have begun an eco-demonstration farm. Local subsistence farmers and smallholders are trained in environmentally friendly cultivation methods. Marginalized members of the community – teenage mothers, those who haven't completed school, the disabled – are invited to be participants on the farm. Being given an opportunity to work on the farm has brought healing and hope to vulnerable neighbors.

Methods on the farm include permaculture techniques, where everything has a purpose and nothing is wasted. For example, pig manure and organic compost are used by the trainees for the kitchen gardens they have established at home.

In addition to providing opportunities for learning and practicing ecological farming, the Sisters themselves are operating their buildings and gardens in sustainable ways. Power for lighting is supplied by renewable, green energy. The solar-powered pump



*Fixing solar panels on the roof of Tororo Eco-Education and Healing Center.*

provides drinking water as well as water for the crops for our Sisters. They carry watering cans and use drip bottles for their kitchen gardens and the trees in the Laudato Si garden.

The installation of the solar system models one effective way to live sustainably in a harsh environment. MMS are delighted to see local change and transformation in and around Tororo. Some neighbors have bought solar lamps to light their homes instead of using more common paraffin lamps. Others have purchased small solar panels to avoid the use of fossil fuels.

Constructing a large building has been another part of this new mission. The structure will provide accommodation for visitors as well

as for the growing number of young women joining Medical Mission Sisters in East Africa. Passionate about sparking climate action, MMS will be providing retreats for participants to deepen their understanding of eco-spirituality and to become advocates in their home communities. Youth are a particular target in hopes they will be a new generation of prized eco-changemakers.

The vision for the Eco-Education and Healing Center is that this comprehensive hub will provide tangible methods of sustainable living and farming as well as inspire a new way of relating to the environment: a deep awareness of our connectedness and responsibility to each other and to earth.



*Sr. Roselynn Ninsiima training participants in agroecology and permaculture.*

# Supporting Ukrainian Refugees in Berlin

*By Sister Thekla Schoenfeld*

In April 2022, the MMS community in Berlin offered accommodation to two young women from Ukraine. Initially they hoped that the war would soon end, and the women could return home. When it became clear the conflict would endure much longer, our Sisters started helping Tanya and Maria find their way through the bureaucracy of obtaining necessary documentation.

Providing a safe space for the two women to live was a small contribution we felt we could make in this extremely difficult situation. We also offered emotional support to Tanya and Maria to help with their fears and concerns for their friends and families still living in Ukraine. At the same time, we enjoyed getting to know

each other and each other's cultures. Cooking, laughing, and celebrating together were rich and meaningful experiences.

Tanya and Maria lived in Berlin for about six months, at which point the two women moved to different places. A bond of friendship remains through messages with Maria who moved to Canada, and visits with Tanya, who still lives in the neighborhood.

Ukraine has moved closer, and the urgent desire for peace has become even stronger. Sharing lives with them, we have experienced one more time that we are all united as part of the human family.



*Medical Mission Sisters rest in front of the "Henriette-Fürth-Haus", a shelter for refugees where Sister Karin Knoetig works.*

## Nine Month War in Ukraine

*By Sister Karin Knoetig*

When the first refugees from Ukraine arrived in Frankfurt in March 2022, many of them said, "We'll be back home in a few weeks!"

The few weeks turned into months. Now the beginning of winter makes it clear there will be no going back for a long time. Added to this is the concern for the relatives left behind about the lack of water, electricity, and heating in the war zones. As a nurse in a shelter for refugees, I often see discouraged residents who are afflicted by feelings of guilt. It is even difficult for them to take care of their own health, knowing that the rest of their family is struggling to survive back in their homeland.

A pregnancy lasts nine months, and new life is born. After nine months of war – where is new life? The recent Advent and Christmas season invited me to hope together with the refugees in "Immanuel - God with Us." Prophetic hope is characterized by constantly seeking God's presence in moments of healing and in moments of darkness, and expressing it in quiet *and* loud ways.

The common struggle and search for God's presence in our reality gives me strength, courage, and hope to expect God even in dark and difficult situations. This hope allows me to approach these refugees again and again and to endure their powerlessness with them.



*Participants on the Eco-farm in Tororo, Uganda, harvest a bumper crop of corn!*

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We see our mission as partaking in the light of God. In this Divine Love, all people and all creation are healed and unified. This vision enkindles and orients our life and mission personally, communally and as a world-wide Society.

Please consider supporting us as we serve out our vision of healing and unity for all people and all creation!

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*Sister Roselyn Ninsiima demonstrates how to prepare organic fertilizers to local youth at the Eco-Education and Healing Center in Tororo, Uganda.*

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