



MEDICAL MISSION SISTERS

Catholic Maternity Institute



Sister at Catholic Maternity Institute



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Photo left to right: Patricia Burkhardt, Srs. Martina Schaefer, and Rosemarie Leier, reminisce about CMI

In 1943 Medical Mission Sisters were restricted in doing mission outside of the United States due to World War II. In June of that year, after receiving permission from Rome and graduating from the Lobenstein School of Midwifery in New York, Srs. Helen Herb and Theophane Shoemaker became pioneers in the opening of the Catholic Maternity Institute (CMI). MMS established CMI in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1944. It was founded to serve the poor Latinx community in Santa Fe, address the state's high maternal mortality rates, and train new nurse midwives. This was MMS's first mission in the United States and the first free-standing birth center in the country.

CMI continued operation for over 20 years; it was a trailblazer for midwifery in the US and played a major part in the advancement of safety in childbirth for women across the country. CMI closed after 20 years, and nurse midwives were integrated in hospitals throughout that region.

Recently, a few of the Sisters who spent time at CMI expressed how much they all enjoyed midwifery. They told stories about accompanying mothers through the entirety of labor, assisting mothers who spoke no English, and the difference between giving birth with a midwife as opposed to a medical doctor.

Sister Mag Moran recalls visiting, in the late 1990's, the building that had housed CMI. At that time, it was an office of Sotheby's International Realty. The receptionist was friendly and gracious when Sister Mag told her she was an MMS and simply interested in seeing the space of their former mission. The buildings and garden, including the wall plaque of Our Lady, were very attractive. After a brief tour of the rooms the receptionist told Sr. Mag that clients often remark that the building has a special feel. Sr. Mag shared that knowing others could still feel something of our MMS presence after all those years was a special gift of the visit.

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