

100 Years of Healing Presence



Jubilee is a call to celebration. In this centennial year, Medical Mission Sisters celebrate with great joy as we sing "Jubilare Deo—Give thanks and glory and praise to God." Anna Dengel was a woman of deep gratitude. She often exhorted us to give thanks to God and to count our blessings. So, we give thanks that our times continue to call us to be pioneers—pioneers in ways we perhaps cannot even imagine. It was the conviction that we are part of God's plan for this world that fired the early pioneers in our Society. It is this same trust in God's Spirit at work which makes us move forward as co-creators with God to bring about the flourishing of all life. This is at the heart of our celebration of Jubilee. So now, in this space and time on this magnificent blue-green planet, we continue to dare to strive to make God's dream of life in abundance a reality for all.

We remember with joy and thanksgiving the century of grace and blessing that has made us who we are today.

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Please help us bring hope and healing!

Ninety-nine years ago, Dr. Anna Dengel and her three companions started the journey of living God's healing mission. She chose the side of women oppressed and declared she was "fire and flame" in her passion to meet a need that only women could meet concretely and with a practice-oriented approach. Today, the MMS 'holy experiment' continues to offer hope in our fractured and hurting world.

Please help us continue to bring hope to the marginalized and those made poor. Will you please support our life and mission with those who suffer from global inequalities and unjust structures? We are grateful for every donor who joins us in our endeavor to "make God's dream of life in abundance a reality for all."

Thank you!

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*Sing unto God a Jubilant Song,
Praising the One to Whom We Belong.*

"Sing unto God a jubilant song, praising the One to whom we belong." With these words from a song written by Sr. Miriam Therese Winter, MMS, we invite you to celebrate with us one hundred years of healing presence as Medical Mission Sisters begin a year of jubilee.

Join us as we remember with joy and thanksgiving the century of grace and blessing that has made us who we are today. Join us in saying Amen to all that has brought us to today. We celebrate our jubilee, remembering the strong women who persevered through challenges and trials, changed church law, impacted health care in many countries, and in the present, the women who continue their commitment to healing in a variety of ministries.

The concept of jubilee is larger than just marking a time to signal an anniversary or holy year. Its roots go back to biblical times and a spirituality that proclaimed God's desire for fullness of life for all people and all creation. Its core values of freedom, justice, respect for the Earth, forgiveness, and community challenged the status quo in its day. At the heart of Jubilee spirituality, these were radical ideas in ancient Israel and still are today. Through our many years of existence, Medical Mission Sisters have also claimed these ways of being in the world as essential to the work of healing and to making life whole.



Photo: Anna Dengel, determined to make a difference in the lives of women, embarked on an unprecedented voyage into the unknown and set sail to America.

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From our earliest years mothers and children were our great concern. When canon law was changed, Sr. Helen Lalinsky was the first woman religious to study medicine so she could provide medical care to women and their children.



Being there for women meant teaching young local women to become professional nurses and midwives to be able to provide good health care for the people of their country.

These core values of jubilee were part of what compelled Medical Mission Sisters to be pioneers even though that is not what our founders and many members set out to be. Our founder, Anna Dengel saw the unmet needs of women who did not have access to medical care, especially in childbirth, and did what was necessary to help alleviate their suffering. Anna often said that our work as medical missionaries was not just charity it was justice.

The dictionary tells us that pioneers are those who go before others and prepare a way. They explore and build the roads and bridges for those who will come after. They are the ones who boldly go in new directions, who lead others to the edges of geography, knowledge, consciousness, or new ways of doing things.

As MMS, we look back over a hundred years with great gratitude for our foremothers, Agnes McLaren and Anna Dengel, who opened the way not only for MMS but also for expanding the boundaries of professional health care and healing mission in the church. Theirs was a vision of a different way that women could “be there” for other women in their time of need. Their conviction urged them to push back barriers, and their compassion revealed a God whose love embraced all and who desired the fullness of life for all.

In the early years of the Society, opening new ways took the form of medical studies along with sustained efforts to convince the church to change its law that forbade religious women to practice medicine and assist women in childbirth. It also meant crossing oceans and continents, and opening clinics, dispensaries, and hospitals in foreign lands. Even more profoundly, pioneering meant learning new languages, eating new foods, opening oneself to new cultures, customs, and being willing to change one’s perspective.

Theirs was a vision of a different way that women could 'be there' for other women in their time of need."



Sister Dr. Rita Schiffer tends to a patient at the Attat Hospital in Ethiopia.

It meant being ready to go wherever sent and to cheerfully and lovingly do the work assigned. Many times, this meant starting from scratch with little help or money and tasked with building a hospital or starting a nursing school.

Like an invisible brand, the call to launch out into the new lived in our bones and marked our souls. It also charged us with energy, contributed to our esprit de corps, grounded our commitment, and molded our identity. It gave places that some might consider the ends of the Earth— Rawalpindi, Pakistan; Berekum, Ghana; Phalombe, Malawi; Ujung Padang, Sulawesi, Indonesia—a home in our everyday consciousness. The pain of women in childbirth and the injustice of inaccessibility of good medical care fired the imagination and gave the courage to even the most timid among us to say, “Here I am, send me.” Today, we draw on the faith-sustaining courage of those original pioneers of the “holy experiment” who, against all odds, dared to experiment with a new form of religious life and mission.

Winds of change came to our Society with the Second Vatican Council, the Medical Mission Sisters 1967 Chapter, and world developments. There were struggles to understand and implement new ideas, to be sure, but new levels of consciousness were emerging and new insights were born. We were



A migrant worker's family receives provisions from Sister Anna Bara in Pune, North India.

changing and being changed. We were challenged to evolve from giving direct medical care, staffing hospitals, and training other health professionals to understand more deeply that to heal is to help others be whole.

The same fire and flame that moved Anna moved inside us to steer us toward new horizons. In the evolution of our understanding of healing, in our growing commitment to justice, and in our new consciousness about the sacredness of Earth, we discovered new frontiers. Many Sisters chose to move out of hospital settings and live in the midst of people, sharing daily life with those made poor. In return, the poor became our teachers through the testimony of their struggles and their joys. We found ourselves on the margins with those pushed to the edges of Society, the oppressed and excluded.

Such experiences again compelled us to explore more deeply the call of healing our broken world. Step by step, we grew into the deeper and broader meaning of healing. To heal is to enable people to develop to their full potential. To heal is to restore dignity. To heal is to reach out to those who have been excluded from wholeness. To heal is to help people who have been prevented from attaining an acceptable quality of life. To heal is to restore relationships. To heal is to work to change unjust structures. To heal is to reverence and protect all of creation. To heal is to work for the liberation of hearts and minds, and souls and bodies.

Our evolutionary journey resulted in a new understanding of who we were and how we were to try to bring wholeness into our broken world. Healing requires us to be an active spiritual presence, that is a presence that activates the power of healing in ourselves and in others. This led the way to immerse ourselves in a widening scope of ministries.

Anna Dengel encouraged us to pay attention to the signs of the times and the times continue to call us to do what needs to be done. In today’s world, we are being called to witness to the oneness of the whole human family and to connect our local involvements with global agendas. This means expanding our hearts and our minds to collaborate with others to be a voice for the voiceless, to expand our impact to promote the fullness of life for the vulnerable, and to truly claim the “whole wide waiting world” as our context for mission.



Being a healing presence is often as simple as taking time to listen to the hopes or concerns of people. Sister Magi Kapito visits with a family in Malawi.