



MEDICAL MISSION SISTERS

Springing Into Action: COVID-19



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SISTERS**

St Catherine of Siena

It is not the hour to seek one's self for one's self, nor to flee pains in order to possess consolations; nay, it is the hour to lose one's self.

On January 31st 2020, the Society Fundraiser made her first visit to the grave of Mother Anna Dengel in Rome. Remembering Mother Dengel's words about becoming 'fire and flame', she packed a book into her bag to read during her travels entitled, "*Setting the World on Fire*", about the brief and astonishing life of St Catherine of Siena. It is written by Shelley Emling. A few pages into the first chapter, she was reminded about the Black Death, la Pestilenza, and how Europe became a breeding ground for the disease, with densely populated cities accelerating its circulation. This included cities in the north, where daily life became a grim battle against the disease. This description made her remember COVID-19, creeping ever closer to Europe - although, in hindsight, at the time of her journey, there were only 2 confirmed cases recorded in Italy. As this number rose dramatically, our thoughts and prayers were very much with poor, suffering Italy during the pandemic. Medical Mission Sisters also began springing into action to respond to the virus elsewhere in the world.

Uganda

In Northern Uganda in their newly established mission with refugees, one of the sisters came across the first local case of COVID-19 in a hospital, although happily, she reports that this patient recovered. Given the risks of the virus reaching the refugee settlements as it spreads through neighbouring countries, the sisters are working hard to encourage local communities to avoid public gatherings and social contact, especially handshakes, and are teaching them to wash their hands frequently, using soap, since no-one can afford hand sanitizer.



Kenya

To love is to be inventive ...

Mother Anna Dengel's instruction to her sisters

This instruction has been put into good practice by the sisters at the Good Shepherd Dispensary in Angiya, Homa Bay, Kenya. They are making face masks for the clinic to help those, who cannot afford them, yet must make journeys to leave their homes for health reasons. They are offering employment to local community members, who lost their jobs due to the pandemic; men are involved in construction works at the new Anna Dengel Academy and women carry water to the site. This building is being designed offer a range of inclusive Early Childhood Development services to local children and their families, including those with HIV/AIDS and children with disabilities.



Ethiopia



At Attat hospital, every preventative measure is being observed at and by the hospital. If the MMS medical team comes across a suspected case, the person will be quarantined in a separate section of the hospital. If a person tests positive, the patient will be transferred to a small specialist hospital for treatment.

Attat's public health team is engaged in extensive awareness raising - both to patients in the waiting area of the hospital and, going from house to house, to alert people of the risks and to advise them on how to stay safe. The sisters expect a lot of hunger in the area along with associated health problems.

Ghana

Holy Family Hospital in Techiman, Ghana, where several Medical Mission Sisters currently work, has formed a COVID-19-Response Team, which is leading the effort to prevent the spread of the virus in their area, whether through public education or by raising awareness, using all available means. The sister pharmacist at the hospital, Sister Rita Amponsaa-Owusu, heads a team, making and packaging a continuous supply of hand sanitizer for use by hospital staff and they sell it, basically at cost, to others in the local community.





India

In India, Sister Smita Parmar ensures social distancing, while delivering food to her Dalit neighbours in North India, who are starving. Elsewhere, Medical Mission Sisters feed families from the slums and, as part of an inter-congregational effort, have packaged donated foods for rickshaw drivers, who are without work and income.

Indonesia

Despite having the largest economy in South East Asia, more than half of Indonesia's workers are in the informal sector, trading, for example, as street vendors and ride-hailing drivers (Go-Jek). Now they cannot work due to the pandemic. The Jakarta MMS Community is involved in food distribution, especially to: informal workers without jobs; homeless garbage and ragpickers; and people with disabilities. The sisters are using bicycles because the ragpickers are not always easy to find. In the meantime, Sr Anke continues her work in Atma Jaya University remotely from home, providing online DBT - that is to say, psychotherapy sessions for Indonesian patients and refugees. There are new patients asking for her tele-psychotherapy services because the outbreak of the virus affects people psychologically - as fear and anxiety grip them.



The Philippines

In the Philippines, there is a growing concern for the well-being and safety of medical and healthcare workers in the frontline of this pandemic. Every Saturday, Medical Mission Sisters prepare and deliver healthy snacks of meals for the health staff at the Lung Centre of the Philippines in Quezon City - one of the country's first testing centres. They also respond to other requests for food assistance, whether among urban poor communities in Manila or four Lumad (indigenous) communities in Quezon.



Peru

In Peru, the sisters and some Associates participate in an inter-congregational work of delivering donated food to the most needy - by foot! This includes families of children with disabilities to ensure that no-one is left behind.



Venezuela

Currently, MMS' Bethany Solidarity Kitchen in Barquisimeto and its 5-day a week feeding programme for about 200 children and vulnerable members of the community has had to stop because food supplies are just not available. The programme will resume as soon as possible. For now, the sisters share just a few bags of food a week with the neediest families.



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Patience
is a virtue
villagers possess.
Waiting
is what one does
to fill
the emptiness.
Time
is simply time,
no expectation
but to be.
If I had time
to take my time,
I could live
patiently.

— *Sister Miriam Therese Winter, M.M.S.*

USA

- Written by Sister Miriam Therese Winter MMS in 1996 while travelling through India, this poem invites us to patience and continuing tenacity during the pandemic.
- Sister Celine Paramundayil, the Society's United Nations representative, is struck by how the pandemic makes us equal: "People who earn a million dollars and children in poverty are in this together. Life matters whether you are rich or poor, white or black, living in a country which is developed or developing."

The Netherlands

Sister Elly Verrijt MMS writes, “For all people around us, life has totally changed, and we know that some of it will stay so. In the open spaces because of the cancelled activities, there is space ... space for one’s self ... to ask some new serious questions, questions of life and death, for us personally, and for the whole community of life. To realise more that each one of us is as vulnerable as the sparrow, the insects, the glaciers, the trees that have already gone.”

United Kingdom

Sisters work with migrants and refugees, many of them homeless, to assist them in getting into shelters, where food is available. One sister works in the Accident and Emergency ward at St Thomas' Hospital, where active cases are admitted for treatment. The Society Leadership Team joins in clapping and drumming for the UK's National Health Service every Thursday evening.



Germany

To combat some of the isolation caused by social distancing, Associate Pia Aporta and other families in her Frankfurt neighbourhood paint messages on their windows to offer “hoffnung” (German for “hope”) - a creative way to be present to others during this time of fear and uncertainty. The sisters also continue to work with hundreds of homeless people in Frankfurt, support refugees and migrants in Duisburg, as well as offering telephone consultations from the public health office in Bottrop and visits to frail, housebound, older people in Essen.

St Catherine of Siena

Be who God meant you to be and
you will set the world on fire.

*Wishing you joy on her feast and
stay safe!*

