

Mother to the World

The movement that had begun when one determined nun walked into the slums grew quickly. More young women came to the Motherhouse wanting to join the new order, and volunteers from many walks of life—doctors, nurses, teachers, and even society wives who wished to do charity work—lent their support.

By 1958, the Missionaries of Charity had established Shishu Bhavan children's homes in several more Calcutta neighborhoods. For older children, Shishu Bhavans established programs to teach skills such as typing, carpentry, and needlework that would help them find jobs. They also sought wealthy sponsors who pledged to pay educational expenses for one or more children, and continued to look for adoptive homes for them. Thanks to Shishu Bhavans, children found homes with Christian and Hindu families in India and with families from Europe and North America as well.

Mother Teresa also started a program of mobile clinics

to help people in parts of Calcutta that didn't have access to medical help. In 1956, New York City's Catholic Relief Services donated \$5,000 to

DISPENSARY

A dispensary is a charity-run medical clinic where medicines are given away, or dispensed, free of charge.

help the Missionaries of Charity convert an old van into a traveling medical dispensary.

This program took on a new urgency when a hospital for lepers in Gobra closed suddenly, leaving thousands of sufferers with no place to turn. A second van, colored bright blue, was outfitted specially for the treatment of leprosy, and made rounds between eight stations in different parts of the city. A retired physician named Dr. Sen, who specialized in skin diseases, volunteered to oversee this new outreach program. By 1958, more than 600 lepers were receiving regular treatment.

Mother Teresa's mobile dispensary visited neighborhoods whose residents had no access to medical care.





The shelter and services provided by the Missionaries of Charity were sometimes humble, but they were a welcome improvement for many leprosy sufferers.

Lepers were social outcasts in India, and many people who contracted the disfiguring disease were thrown out by frightened and ashamed

family members. Unable to work and with no place to live, they had little choice but to become beggars. Wanting to do more for these people, Mother Teresa went to visit a Calcutta suburb called Titlagarh, where a group of lepers had formed a small makeshift village alongside an industrial swamp. Most of them could not afford the train or bus fare to Calcutta to receive services from the mobile van, and even if they could scrape together the money, they were often banned from riding on public transportation.

Mother Teresa resolved to open a new clinic, and sent several Sisters with medical training to work in Titlagarh. She launched a citywide campaign called “Touch a Leper with Your Compassion” to help raise funds. Although the first wave of construction in Titlagarh was met by gangs throwing stones, the sisters soon overcame the community’s resistance

and opened a hospital, rehabilitation center, and cafeteria. As important as the medicines they dispensed was the sisters' attitude towards these long-suffering people. Instead of avoiding all physical contact, they were happy to touch and comfort the lepers, seeing in their plight the sufferings of Jesus Christ. This went against established medical practice, and Mother Teresa was sometimes criticized for not encouraging her followers to protect themselves by wearing sterile gloves.

The facility for leprosy in Titlagarh was soon followed by a second, called Shantinagar, which means "place of peace." The land for the facility—34 acres of overgrown jungle—was donated by the Indian government. When money ran short during construction, the Sisters of Charity did what they always did: They prayed.

Their prayers were sometimes answered in unexpected ways. In 1964, Pope Paul VI would make an official state visit to India, traveling in a specially imported white Lincoln Continental. He was so impressed by the Nirmal Hriday home for the dying that he gave this car to Mother Teresa when he left India. She immediately raffled it off, raising about \$100,000—enough money to finish construction at Shantinagar.

During these years of expansion, Mother Teresa began to realize the value of public relations. She had been the subject of many flattering articles in the Indian press, which had resulted in further donations and new volunteers.



Starting in 1959, the Missionaries of Charity expanded their operations in

India to the cities of Delhi, Jhansi, and Bombay (now called Mumbai). Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru attended the opening ceremony of a Shishu Bhavan children's home in the capital city of New Delhi, where he spoke warmly to Mother Teresa about her work.

In the fall of 1960, Mother Teresa set her sights even farther afield. By now, she was 50 years old and in charge of 119 nuns and hundreds of volunteers. In keeping with her increasingly public profile, she accepted an invitation to travel to the United States. Her first stop: a convention of the National Council of Catholic Women in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The glittering lights of the Strip in Las Vegas were a startling contrast to the slums of Calcutta.

It's hard to imagine a more unlikely destination for a missionary nun who hadn't traveled outside of India for 30 years. Sometimes known as "The Entertainment Capital of the World," the desert resort also went by the name of "Sin City."

Since the mid-1940s, when gangster Bugsy Siegel established the Flamingo Hotel in the sleepy desert town, Las Vegas had been known for its gambling casinos, liquor, adult entertainment, and connections to organized crime. Its chief attraction was a four-and-a-half-mile (7.2 km) stretch of brightly lit hotels, casinos, and entertainment venues known as the Strip.

When asked what she thought of Las Vegas, Mother Teresa made no mention of its gambling resorts and nightclubs, but replied tactfully that the bright neon lights of the Strip reminded her of the Indian festival of lights, Diwali.

During this trip, Mother Teresa went out to the

Festival of Lights

Diwali is a joyous holiday, celebrated throughout India. A major religious holiday for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Nepali Buddhists, it is also a school holiday and time of family celebration. Diwali is celebrated on the new moon of the Autumn month of Kartika, when celebrants decorate their homes with lights (often rows of small clay oil lamps), set off fireworks, offer prayers to the goddess Lakshmi, and exchange sweets and gifts.



nearby desert to gather spiny thorns from a cactus. When she arrived home in Calcutta, she twisted these into a crown of thorns and placed it on the head of the statue of Christ in the Missionaries of Charity's chapel.

But however exotic the convention's location may have seemed to Mother Teresa, her fund-raising speech was an unqualified triumph. It was her first time onstage as a public speaker, and she addressed the 3,000 Catholic women at the convention in simple, heartfelt terms, talking about her mission among the poorest of the poor. She told them that she had not come to ask for donations, because she believed that God would provide, but invited her audience to look for ways they could do something beautiful for God. Many of them gave her handfuls of cash as they left the auditorium, stuffing the small bag she carried so full that she had to empty it three times into something larger to hold all the money.

Mother Teresa's tour of America continued with stops in Peoria, Illinois; Chicago; and New York City. She had hoped to meet with the newly elected American president John F. Kennedy, who was a practicing Catholic, but this did not come to pass. However, she did meet with the influential radio and television evangelist Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, and with the director of the World Health Organization. Then she continued to Europe.

In London, Mother Teresa met with a representative of Oxfam, an organization that works to alleviate poverty and suffering throughout the world, and was interviewed by the



British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

A border guard patrols a checkpoint on the Albanian border.

She then continued to Germany, where she was greeted enthusiastically by representatives of the Catholic relief agency Misereor. They pledged their financial support to a planned home for the dying in Delhi, asking only that the Missionaries of Charity send a financial report to show how the money was spent. They were astonished when Mother Teresa refused, saying that her sisters did not have the time or expertise to provide such documents. Her refusal to follow standard accounting procedures would be the source of much controversy as the Missionaries of Charity grew ever larger.

She also made stops in Switzerland and Rome, where she had an emotional reunion with her brother Lazar, the first time she had seen any of her family members since

her departure for Ireland at age 18. As an Albanian soldier, Lazar had joined the Italian army during World War II. He and others who served in Italy (an Axis ally of Germany and Japan) were now considered traitors and were forbidden to return home to Albania under threat of death. Although Lazar had made a new life for himself in Italy—where he worked for a company that manufactured medicines, and had an Italian wife and young daughter—he longed to visit his mother and sister, who had moved from Skopje to Albania before World War II broke out. Mother Teresa applied for a visa so that she could visit them herself, but her request was turned down, either because of her brother's military history or because the now-Communist government of Albania did not approve of her affiliation with the Catholic Church.

Mother Teresa eventually went back to India, but even as she returned to her usual work, the world around her was changing. For example, the church itself was undergoing some profound changes during the 1960s. Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962, looking for ways to modernize some of the church's ancient rituals. During this period, some texts were changed from Latin to modern languages, certain rules (such as the ban on eating meat on Fridays) were relaxed, and many nuns stopped wearing traditional habits.

There would be no updating of Mother Teresa's order, however. From the start, she had insisted on rigid discipline and unquestioning obedience from her followers, even

PONTIFICAL

Pontifical means having to do with the pontiff, another name for the pope.

going so far as to give the sisters a specific prayer to recite as they put on each garment. The Missionary Sisters of Charity were forbidden to read newspapers and magazines or listen to radio news, since Mother Teresa felt that awareness of current events would be a distraction from their religious vocation. She also discouraged them from pursuing higher education, with the occasional exception of medical training.

But old-fashioned and sheltered as they may have been, the Missionaries of Charity were about to enter the larger world in a very significant way. In 1965, Pope Paul VI granted permission for Mother Teresa's order to become a Society of Pontifical Right, giving them permission to move outside of India for the first time. Overjoyed, she described this as "the biggest miracle of all."

That July, Mother Teresa and five other sisters boarded a plane to Venezuela, where they were to found their first international home.

Pope Paul VI, who served as pope from 1963 to 1978, helped reform the Catholic church with the Second Vatican Council, which was completed during his papacy.

