



# Women in International Ministry: Healing the Poor in India — Dr. Teresa Henry

By Ana Gobledale

***“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” —Matthew 25:40 NRSV***

WHEN MY HUSBAND, Tod, and I arrived in Plumtree, Zimbabwe, in 1981, there were two part-time doctors at the local hospital serving 100,000 people in a rural area the size of Connecticut. Then...they left. After that patients requiring care beyond the capacity of the nursing staff were driven to the hospital in the nearest city, when the van was available and running. On top of that, most of our parishioners lived out in the bush, a 2-3 hour bus ride, when the bus came. Getting medical assistance was no easy task. As we buried babies, children and the elderly, we realized the disastrous impact of distant health care on the lives of real people. Lack of access to adequate medical care persists today, not only in Africa, but in Asia and other parts of our world.

Global Ministries, committed to provide medical missionaries in areas of greatest need, appointed Teresa and Anil Henry to serve at Christian Hospital in Mungeli, a small town in central India, where Teresa is senior medical officer and anesthesiologist. As I follow Teresa’s path from India to the USA and back to India, her unchanging commitment to heal

the poor, to serve God, and to make a difference in the world is inspiring. One of Teresa’s favourite hymns, expresses this commitment to serve where God can use her most:

*I the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in deepest sin,  
my hand will save.  
I, who made the stars of night, I will  
make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?  
Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.  
(lyrics by Daniel Schutte)*

I hope you, too, will find inspiration in Teresa’s story, her clarity of call, and her faithfulness to that call.

Ana

## CHILDHOOD IN INDIA

Teresa was born in Dhamtari, a small town in central India, at the Mennonite mission hospital where her father was a doctor. She grew up on the hospital campus and attended the Mennonite church. She writes, “As a child growing up in a mission hospital environment, I was mostly influenced by my father who was one of the first and few doctors in those days to get an FRCS degree from abroad. He would

have been very prosperous had he started his own private practice, but his faith and commitment to the mission hospital (which he took over after the American Mennonite missionaries left) kept him going despite hardships, until he retired after giving 40 years of service. He was not an ‘appointed’ missionary, but I consider him a missionary in his own right and learned commitment from him and my mother who supported him through thick and thin.”



### A CALL TO MEDICINE

Teresa attended the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, started by Dr. Ida Scudder, the daughter of a Congregational medical missionary. Ida, her dedication and life, serves as a model for Teresa. As a young woman, Ida, in a single night, witnessed 3 women die during childbirth. She realized the only reason those women died was because men were not welcome at the births, and only men were trained as doctors. Consequently, Ida pursued a medical degree from the U.S. and returned to India to start a medical school for women. Teresa writes, "This made me think about how I, as a woman and a doctor, could make a difference in the lives of people around me. I realized that being a medical missionary was my call and would best fulfill my desire to do my bit to help the sick and needy."

### A CALL BACK TO INDIA

For a time, Teresa and Anil lived in Nashville, Tennessee, where Anil worked in a Baptist hospital. They came to realize that, "what we were doing in the US will not make much of a difference as compared to what we could do in rural India where not many doctors want to come and work. We could do a lot to improve the health-care of the poor and provide the kind of medical facilities which they are unable to get for want of money."



### TERESA'S FAVOURITE BIBLE VERSE

***"For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."***

*—John 3:16 NRSV (adapted)*

### A CALL TO SERVE THE POOR AT MUGELI: JOYS AND CHALLENGES

Teresa and Anil were sent by Global Ministries to Mugeli, "to revive the hospital which was on the brink of closing down." Now the hospital treats 30,000 outpatients, performs 2500 surgeries and conducts 600 deliveries annually. In addition to her work at the hospital, Teresa serves as Manager of the English Medium School which enrolls 400 students, from nursery to grade 10.

For Teresa, "The most rewarding part of my work is to see the smiles and joy on the peoples' faces, and their relatives, as they get better and go back to their normal lives. It is also a joy to save a newborn's life, which otherwise would not have survived due to the various reasons that women





in labour can not or do not reach the hospital on time." Her greatest challenge is "to make a person understand the need for medical intervention on time." She describes factors which hinder rural patients timely arrival at the hospital which include "ignorance and unwillingness on the part of the relatives, poverty, lack of proper roads and transport from the villages."

### STRENGTHENED BY FAITH AND PRACTICE

Morning staff devotions in the hospital chapel are part of the fabric of Teresa's day at the mission hospital. Prayer and care are integrated. Teresa explains, "Before each surgery, we say a short prayer, placing the patient in God's hands. Personally, I work to the best of my abilities and leave the rest to God who is the Divine Healer. I see God in every human being suffering from sickness or poverty. As Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, '...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' I see God face-to-face in every patient who comes to the hospital, who is poor in health and wealth, and I try to treat them as I would my own."

\*Ana Gobledale has served our church through Global Ministries in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the USA and Australia. She and her husband, Tod, currently serve as co-ministers at St. Andrew's United Reformed Church in London.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What inspires you about Teresa's life and ministry?
2. How are you and your church community involved in ministry to "the least of these"?
3. Those of us who are not doctors do not usually have the opportunity to save a newborn's life, but we do have opportunities to make a difference. How have you made a difference in someone's life? Who has made a difference in your life?

## Prayer Points

1. Teresa and Anil Henry and their medical mission in India
2. The staff and patients, especially the children, at Christian Hospital in Mugeli, India
3. Doctors, nurses and other medical personnel serving around the world who share their healing talents with the poor
4. All the Global Ministries missionaries supported by Our Church's Wider Mission offerings

## Action Opportunities

1. Write to Teresa or another Global Ministries medical missionary encouraging them in their work and mission.
2. Learn more about India. Find Mugeli and Vellore on a map. Familiarize yourself with some of the major issues in India today related to medical care for women and children.
3. Make a bulletin board to teach others in your congregation about the history of the United Church of Christ mission in India.
4. Through Global Ministries, identify and undertake a project to assist a medical mission.