

# OPEN

## Following the Footsteps of LCMS Women Missionaries

### Risking it all for the Gospel

#### Part II

By Marlys Taege Moberg

[This article concludes the two-part series, "The Historic Journey of LCMS Women."]

As doors to mission service opened to Lutheran women within our nation's boundaries, many LCMS women followed in the footsteps of New Testament missionaries like Priscilla and the Samaritan woman. Starting nearly 100 years ago, dozens of LCMS women missionaries — willing to risk it all for the sake of the Gospel — left their homeland to share the Good News in distant lands.

Women missionaries traveled first to India. **Nurse Lulu Ellermann** began LCMS medical mission work there in 1913, after LCMS women's societies pledged \$600 for that purpose. She established a veranda



Nurse Lulu Ellermann  
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medical dispensary from her bungalow in Bargur, India, and, in 1920, she was joined by **Nurse Angela Rehwinkel**.

When Dr. Theodore Doederlein arrived in India in 1921, Bethesda Lutheran Hospital was founded in Ambur, India. There



Nurse Angela Rehwinkel  
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was no electricity; rooms were lit by kerosene lanterns, and windows had bars but no screens. Before the doctor left the field in 1923, he appointed

Angela nursing superintendent of the hospital, a position she held for 37 1/2 years. As doctors came and went, she became the glue that held the hospital together.



Olive Gruen  
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During the same time, the first woman commissioned as a missionary to China was **Olive Gruen**. There she supervised a girls' orphanage, founded boarding schools, led innumerable

Bible studies for Chinese women and girls, and touched thousands of lives for Christ. She also survived wars, uprisings, earthquakes, robberies, illnesses,



Bethesda Hospital Staff, Ambur, India, 1944

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two evacuations, and the largest flood in the history of China. Throughout it all, her constant plea to the Mission Board was, "Send more workers!" She served in China from 1921 until 1946, when the Communist regime forced all the missionaries to leave.

but what about the 22 who were less than two years old? With three other women, Gertrude transported them 200 miles to safety. The journey took two weeks on foot as they carried their charges, many of them infants, across a mountain range and a major river. Frequently they camped in caves to escape Japanese bombing.

**Deaconess Martha Boss**, a Lutheran nurse, teacher, and evangelist, served in China and Hong Kong from 1945–1973. So refugees might have a means of livelihood, she invested her life savings in the Lutheran Handicraft Center.



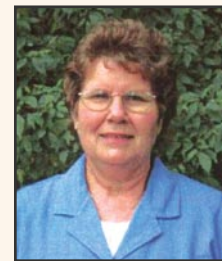
Deaconess Martha Boss

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Today, LCMS women continue to serve around the world in many capacities, including teaching, Gospel sharing, administration, medical missions, Bible translation, and development of written languages. Their work is recognized not only by the church but also by govern-



Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf thanks Alvena Federwitz.



Alvena Federwitz

ments, as was the case recently with African-based Lutheran Bible translator **Alvena Federwitz**.

Alvena and her husband, Rev. Dale Federwitz, began their missionary career with Lutheran Bible Translators in 1971. After linguistic training, they were sent to Liberia, where they raised their four children. Now grown, three of them and their spouses are serving on the mission field, and the fourth is preparing to do the same!

Although Alvena lost her companion and partner in 2002 to cancer, she did not lose her passion for making God's Word accessible to African people. Her special interest is the use of oral and cultural methods — such as traditional storytelling — to present God's Word to people in their own language.

Along with her husband, Alvena had become concerned that in Liberia "many very bright children fell out of school because their education was only in English, a language that was foreign to them and their parents." As unrest escalated there, the Federwitzes knew that they might have to leave Liberia, and the translation work would "come to a screeching halt." Their goal became to empower Liberians to carry on Mother

Tongue translation. It is for this dedication to the Liberian people that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf honored Alvena.

On the last day of a Mother Tongue workshop involving 16 language groups in Liberia in July 2007, the country's Minister of Education arranged an audience with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for Alvena and key workshop staff. As they were leaving the Cabinet Room, Alvena was informed that the president wanted to honor her during the celebration of Liberia's 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence!

On that occasion, the president thanked Alvena for her great contributions to Liberia, awarded her the Humane Order of African Redemption, and said, "Truly you are a hero!"

The same can be said of all LCMS women who have dedicated their lives to being in mission at home and abroad — those who have courageously walked through open doors and humbly risked it all for the Gospel.

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Nurse Gertrude Simon

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**Nurse Gertrude Simon** also served in China, beginning in 1926. Turbulent political conditions in Hankow forced her to evacuate in 1928. When she returned a year later, she was assigned to manage the Lutheran medical clinic and orphanage in Enshih. After the Japanese invaded China, life there became dangerous, making it necessary to move the orphans. The dilemma: the older ones could be taken to farms outside the city,

Photos on pages 7 and 8 courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute (CHI), St. Louis, Missouri.