

FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

Louise Elisabeth Ellermann

Born: August 3, 1884
Evansville, Indiana

Died: January 11, 1957
Clarinda, Iowa

A brave and dedicated missionary nurse who showed Christian mercy to the sick—especially women and children—in South India.



Louise Ellerman

CHRIST SHOWED GRACE TO HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT LOUISE ELISABETH ELLERMANN, the Missouri Synod's first missionary health care worker. Her medical dispensary in India opened up a new avenue for missions. Thousands of sick and dying—especially women and children—were, for the first time, exposed to the Christian Gospel through her acts of mercy. Ellermann was able to reach a demographic group not previously accessible. Because of the role of women in Indian society, male missionaries were not allowed to speak to any women directly, much less proclaim the Gospel to them. Ellermann was allowed to serve this previously unreachable group as she provided critical medical care to women, as well as children and men by setting up a medical dispensary in 1914. All kinds of people came to the dispensary with all kinds of illnesses; Ellermann did her best to care for them as competently as one nurse could with the very limited supplies and medical knowledge she possessed during her eight-year service in India. When the patients came to the dispensary, they were presented with the Gospel—through printed Gospel “chits”—while waiting to see the nurse. This was the first overtly social ministry of the Missouri Synod in South India. It showed how social ministries could be properly tied to the proclamation of Christ. This led to health care becoming a central part of Missouri Synod missions around the world.

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Louise Elisabeth Ellermann

- August 3, 1884 - Born in Evansville, Indiana.
- August 17, 1884 - Baptized Trinity Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana.
- Summer 1907 - Graduated as nurse from Deaconess Hospital, Evansville, Indiana.
- April 24, 1913 - Mrs. Zucker raises \$600.00 per year from Ladies' Societies to send a nurse to India.
- October 4, 1913 - Leaves United States for India.
- November 4, 1913 - Arrives in India at Krishnagiri.
- December 1913 - Went to Kodaikanal and spent time with Mrs. Gutknecht (wife of a missionary); Began a "munchi" Tamil language training course.
- March 3, 1914 - Ellermann visits several hospitals in Koda, Villore, and Madras. She has learned the culture of Indian medicine and picked up enough Tamil to provide medical care.
- May 10, 1914 - She moves to Ambur and starts doing house calls.
- June 18, 1914 - Sets up a dispensary in Krishnagiri by dedicating a room of a house for it.
- May 19, 1921 - Without a temporary building for the dispensary in Ambur, Ellerman begins work on the back of her bungalow.
- April 2, 1927 - Despite many protests, the board finally accepts her resignation.
- September 8, 1927 - Married Joe Sunderman in Clarinda, Iowa. Started a career farming with Mr. Sunderman in 1927.
- During World War II - Served the local Red Cross as a nurse.
- January 11, 1957 - Died in Clarinda, Iowa at the age of 72.

AFTER MORNING PRAYERS I BEGIN. I AM SURE IN THE PRACTICE of my profession I will always be loyal to the patients, physicians, government and mission under whom I serve. I try to lead my life and practice my profession in uprightness and honor. Whatever house I enter it is for the good of the sick. And I will strive in every way for improvement...I am sure this is paving the way for the missionary... These poor women are shut up into their homes and their lives are very dark and bare. Sometimes we think life at home is narrow and hard, but it is rich and luxurious, no matter how hard a woman must toil, in comparison with the lot of a Hindu woman, hemmed in, with nothing to think of, no chance to grow, no outlook for this life or the next. As a Christian woman I hope to guide these gentle dark faced women to a better life. ... As a nurse I have many chances to relieve their body from pain and suffering. I am busy and I hope useful, and I am very thankful and happy.

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