

# HEALING LIVES

SPRING 2022



medical ambassadors

INTERNATIONAL

healing lives...transforming communities

*Woman by God's Design*

# HEALING LIVES

SPRING 2022

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## from the Editorial Team

by Anja Suratt

**M**y husband and I recently moved into an older home. Although most of the rooms were “move in ready,” the basement bathroom leaves much to be desired. The space is large, but the layout, the fixtures, the tiles, and colors ... nothing is appealing. It needs a re-model. Oh! how I wish I could hire a designer.

Today it seems that everyone is looking for a designer. Who made your dress? Your jeans? New watch or jewelry? It probably has the initials or stamp of a well-known designer. More value is placed on an object depending on the designer ... Michael Kors. Tiffany & Co. Cartier. Everything is designed. Whether it is your car, your phone, what you wear or eat, even the sheets you will sleep on tonight or the magazine you are holding. Someone picked the colors and decided how it would look. Someone decided its purpose, chose how it would work, and what it would accomplish. Even the things we cannot grasp or touch such as music, a game, or a movie. Someone planned it, put it together so that it would be attractive and work for you or please you or help you.

Our great God while designing and creating this world looked throughout His creation and realized there was no suitable

helper for the man that he had created as it says in Genesis 2:20-22. And so, He created a woman ... suitable for the man and for the world. The Bible tells us that God presented the woman to the man. I find that significant. As if the Lord was particularly happy about what He had created! God designed her unique look and beauty, gave her purpose and work, provided her with gifts and appointed her great value.

The women who have contributed to the pages before you are all uniquely designed and gifted for the regions and type of work to which they have been called by the Lord. Women who have been educated and trained to teach and help others find their way in this world as well as introduce them to the Savior. They are each a *Woman by God's Design*.

### NOTE:

We've included many videos throughout this magazine using specific QR codes. To view, open your camera on your smartphone. Hover over the QR Code so that it's clearly visible within your smartphone's screen. The link will appear to view the content. Click on the link. OR download a QR reader from your play store.



## Introduction

In 2020, Medical Ambassadors International (MAI) launched “*Woman by God’s Design*”, a campaign to raise awareness and support for our programs that improve the lives of women and girls spiritually, physically, and relationally. This special edition of *Healing Lives Magazine* highlights the stories we shared and some of the incredible women serving in the mission field to bring transformational change.

For over 40 years, MAI has been equipping communities through Christ-centered health and development. MAI uses a development process called Community Health Evangelism (CHE). CHE is a multifaceted approach to Christian ministry that addresses the needs of the whole person—physical, spiritual, emotional, and social. Over a period of several years, whole communities are lifted out of cycles of poverty and disease. It is a strategic way to facilitate holistic transformational development or integral mission.

MAI has been able to harness the active engagement of well over 52,442 CHE volunteers around the globe. At present MAI works in 2,674 communities around the world impacting a population of over 2.98 million people in 75 countries.

Women are often the most engaged change mobilizers in communities in the developing world.

### Serving Women & Girls through CHE

*“The plight of women in many societies, with its resulting health problems, emotional trauma, high infant and maternal mortality rates, calls out for action. The will to change must come from within communities. We must give women a voice, encourage them to use it and then listen when they do.”* Emma Wakpi, Community Health Education Area Coordinator for Papua New Guinea.

Around the world, gender discrimination and oppression is keeping women and girls from realizing their full potential and worth. MAI is improving the lives of women and girls spiritually, physically, and relationally through the Women’s Cycle of Life (WCL) program; an adapted form of CHE curriculum which deals with women’s health issues—from adolescence to childbearing, care of children to menopause. We address gender inequality and oppression from the perspective that we are all created by God’s beautiful design with great purpose and worth.

# History of Women's Cycle of Life

*compiled by Emily Fitchpatrick from interviews*



In 1999, Charleen McWilliam, R.N., realized her work in a Northern California prenatal public health program, which provided care to low-income at-risk women, could coincide well with what her husband, Rev. John McWilliam, was doing with CHE at MAI. Charleen approached Stan

Rowland, the creator of the CHE strategy, and he encouraged her to create curriculum that could be used globally. Seeing the benefit of this idea, Dr. Paul Calhoun (past Executive Director of MAI) asked Charleen to join MAI as a maternal-child health consultant. Charleen agreed. She traveled internationally with MAI, testing and refining lessons with local CHE workers and eventually developed the Community Health Evangelism Perinatal Support (CHEPS curriculum).

These lessons were found to be greatly valued by communities in the developing world. By the year 2000, the world was sounding the alarm about the growing HIV pandemic. Governments were forced to pay attention to the plight of women and were looking for solutions.

MAI was asked to develop a comprehensive program for HIV which could be used within the CHE strategy for pregnant women. The program screened pregnant women for HIV and provided education on prevention and treatment. The model was successfully used in CHE communities worldwide in dealing with this pandemic. By 2005, the CHE Perinatal (CHEPS) programs began to address women's issues beyond pregnancy. The more comprehensive curriculum became known as Women's Cycle of Life. MAI expanded WCL's reach by training different organizations, resulting in further multiplication.

Today WCL has grown into a curriculum which deals directly with women's health issues, family relationships and one's relationship with God. Gender inequality is addressed from the perspective that women and men are uniquely created

by God and have equal value in His eyes. Biblical teaching highlights how precious each person is to God. The lessons are basic and simple to teach, making them easily transferable.

Examples include:

- A Woman's Worth—God's Perspective
- Created in the Image of God
- Great Women of God
- Beauty & God's Word
- Marriage— Love and Respect
- Forgiveness
- Mother-in-law / Daughter-in-law Relationships
- Abuse & Violence in the Family
- Nutrition
- Stages of Womanhood: Puberty through Menopause
- Hygiene
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- How God Designed Women – Anatomy & Physiology

**Charm is deceitful,  
and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who  
fears the Lord is to  
be praised.  
Proverbs 31:30**

# Starting Over

by Dr. Bibiana MacLeod

**D**r. Bibiana MacLeod, M.D. went to Haiti from Argentina as a missionary doctor, but it took four years for her to realize that people were still getting sick in their communities, and she needed a different approach to prevent diseases.

*"My missionary life started the day I landed in Haiti back in 1989 as a young independent Argentine Medical Doctor, who wanted to serve God among the poor. Pretty soon I realized I had little to offer to a country with a rich history of spiritual slavery, disease, poverty, and literally thousands of other missionaries and Non-Governmental Organizations that had preceded me in the past 100 years. What was I thinking? The hospital where I initially worked was loaded with suffering people, to the point of having to select the sicker ones to be seen each day. Then, as I moved to a more remote area to work in an outpatient clinic with a staff of 14 people seeing 1,200 patients a month, the growing stream of patients made me wonder if this was the most effective way to serve them. Children coming time and again with the same preventable diseases clearly showed our failure to facilitate permanent changes.*

*So, when I joined MAI and learned CHE as an alternative for ministry, offering a way to integrate my faith and profession, I immediately responded to God's invitation to do things differently. I have been involved in this transformational process for thirty*



*years and have witnessed sustainable change. CHE provokes local leaders to think for themselves and solve the challenges presented in their communities from within, taking an integral approach, spiritual, emotional, physical. We facilitate dialogue and promote solutions with local resources first, avoiding dependency and preserving dignity, equipping the locals to teach their neighbors. We encourage community ownership and participation."*

Bibiana and her husband, Alexander, live in Atlantic, Canada where they are actively involved with Medical Ambassadors Canada Association (MACA), the sister organization of MAI based in Edmonton, Alberta. They have served as full-time workers to implement CHE, first in Haiti, and some years later, in Cuba and Dominican Republic, where they lived for 3 years. They then served as coordinators in South America and the Caribbean from 2005 to 2018, when new local leaders took over the task. Bibiana is now MAI's Resource Facilitator in Disaster Preparedness, Orality, Human Trafficking, and 1,000 Days Program.

**YOUR GENDER CARRIES GOD'S SEAL: A video devotional by Dr. Bibiana MacLeod about women of the Bible who God used in special ways.**



# Overview

## Women's Cycle of Life

by Maggie Conrad

**W**omen's Cycle of Life (WCL) focuses on a woman's physical, spiritual, and relational health throughout her lifespan. Women of all ages can discover practical knowledge at the community level on women's health from puberty to menopause, including safer pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care. WCL helps women have healthier marriages and family relationships. Transformative Biblical truths are integral to WCL and help women see their great value in God's eyes. Women who have lacked self-worth begin to understand that from God's perspective, they are equal in value to men, and begin to see their God-given capacity. They hear of the lives of great women of the Bible. They ponder how God sent Jesus to be their Savior and Lord.

Lessons include the following and more:

- Human Trafficking Prevention
- Stages of Womanhood: Puberty through Menopause
- Conception and Fetal Growth
- Making Pregnancy and Delivery Safer
- Preparing for Unexpected Emergencies During Childbirth
- Newborn Care and Child spacing



**A**нна belongs to the Maasai tribe and lives in Southern Kenya. Traditionally in her culture, a woman's value has been measured by how many cows are paid as a bride price by her future husband. Men in her tribe can have as many wives as they can afford. As Anna began to learn that God values her every bit as much as He values her husband, the news was stunning and so welcome. She was so happy to be introduced to the love of her Heavenly Father and the gift of eternal life that He has given her through faith in Jesus. Her tribe is changing as more of them come to faith. The tradition of female circumcision is deeply engrained in Maasai culture but is being opposed by Maasai Christians. The younger women are benefitting from this change. Anna's daughters may be able to go to school and learn to speak English. They can wait until they are a little older to marry, instead of marrying at puberty. Fewer Maasai may die of AIDS, as those who come to faith slowly begin to change sexual practices to become more in line with what God intended. The risk of Maasai extinction from AIDS is lessening. God has used Women's Cycle of Life and CHE as some of the tools to bring transformation. Anna knows her real worth now, esteems herself and is more valued by others. She is rising as a more capable woman. She has hope for the future, for her daughters and for eternity. Life is not easy, but it is so much better.

The following are some examples of areas that are taught, and how this curriculum has changed lives.

Continued from previous page

## Healthy Birthing Life Saving Skills

Healthy Birthing Life Saving Skills lessons address the major causes of maternal and newborn death and illness, introducing practical prevention and first aid measures that have saved many lives. In an Asian country that suffers from very poor maternal-newborn health, men's and women's lessons have helped shift the worldview from fatalistic to "can do" and have impacted the well-being of childbearing families and future generations. SO many lives have been saved and many have found new life.

For example, in many places in the developing world, if a baby is born not breathing, it is assumed that the baby is dead. No intervention occurs, only grief. Raising awareness of simple supportive measures can lead to lifesaving changes! Stimulating and drying babies, as well as removing



mucous from the mouth often result in a responsive crying baby that has the potential to thrive. Occasionally, giving breaths is needed. Simple steps . . . a precious baby's life saved.

What a tragedy to let a life go so easily . . . if only they knew what to do. Increasingly, in some places, they do know!



First Thousand Days (FTD) focuses on that crucial time from conception to birth to age two, when a child's future is shaped in very important ways. Whether the child does poorly or thrives during this time, can make the difference between a bright future and a life of struggle. Helping families discover how to provide good nutrition, disease prevention, stable responsive relationships, and nurturing, safe environments are all included in these lessons.

Did you know that the wealth of nations (or lack thereof) can be predicted by the health of their children in the first 1000

## First Thousand Days (FTD)

days of their lives? The World Bank is paying attention to this issue. In our world, one in four children under five years of age suffers from stunting, physically, cognitively, or both. Stunting is a result of chronic undernutrition. It results in lessening potential for educational achievement as well as lower future productivity and income. It also contributes to higher health care costs. All of this affects individuals, families, communities, and nations.

*"Putting an end to extreme malnutrition will lay the foundation for improving the health and well-being of the present generation and lead to benefits for future generations over the twenty-first century. Nutrition is the true foundation of sustainable poverty reduction, yet it is still neglected. It is time to spread a broader awareness of the worldwide challenges of nutrition—and its links with health and sustainable development—and of the new opportunities for making global progress."*

<https://www.unhcr.org/45f6c4432.pdf>

This curriculum has opened doors for CHE in places such as Haiti and the Philippines. Progress has been slowed on First Thousand Days in the Philippines as it was introduced not long before the pandemic. The Filipino government is very supportive of this endeavor.

# Men Matter

Men Matter consists of lessons designed to help men bless their families. The lesson series title suggests the crucial importance of men in building healthy, thriving families. Often some men are rightly blamed for tearing down their families. What is being done to help men rise out of the suffering, abuse, and/or neglect they have experienced and the resulting impact on their current lives? Helping men deal with their struggles, past and present can lead to healthier environments for the next generation and improved well-being for all. God cares about men and wants them to reflect His love as the Heavenly Father to their children, and to teach children of the God who loves them so deeply that he sent Jesus to bring life to them.

Men's involvement has greatly blessed their families. They have discovered ways to work together to overcome safe health care obstacles such as lack of local resources, distance to care, transportation, inadequate roads, and even fatalism. Family well-being has risen, and lives have been saved! As Central Asian men have learned more about what their wives experience, their respect for and relationship to their wives has grown.



## Community Health Evangelism (CHE)

Through more than 41 years of practical experience MAI recognizes the key to overcoming poverty. Through Integral Mission using word and deed and using CHE lessons, local people learn to lead in their own communities and are empowered by the Spirit of God to make positive changes.



COUNTRIES WHERE WE  
WORK DIRECTLY

**40**

MAI COMMUNITIES  
PRACTICING CHE

**2,674**



POPULATION IMPACTED

**2.98 mm**

WORLDWIDE CHE  
VOLUNTEERS

**52,442**



COUNTRIES WHERE  
WE PARTNER

**35**

# Women serving in the mission field

compiled by Emily Fitchpatrick from interviews



## Meet Lia

Serving in Cape Verde, West Africa

poverty is still a main problem and there are growing disparities between rich and poor regions.

According to research by Humanium on Cape Verde, other problems include a lack of resources, poor housing conditions, and failure of social protection for children. Almost 20% of the population lives with mediocre sanitation facilities, housing conditions, and access to drinking water. Children in rural areas are particularly affected. Despite the progress to date, child mortality is still too common. Most deaths are due to diarrhea, respiratory problems, malnutrition, and other health issues. Health education is lacking, especially regarding the prevention of teen pregnancy, the widespread practice of non-medical abortions, and the battle against STDs and HIV/AIDS.

Cape Verde is a country in West Africa. It's made up of a region of islands collectively known as Macaronesia. Cape Verde has won a positive reputation in promoting what is considered the most stable democracy in Africa, with a standard of living higher than most African nations. However,



Many girls are affected by the practice of “temporary suspension of pregnant students,” and don’t resume their schooling after they give birth. Some children live in the streets due to their level of poverty. These children exist in higher numbers in the main city centers. They usually work as car washers or vendors. These children are usually vulnerable, and at-risk of abuse or being forced by adults to commit robberies. Cape Verde is also a transit country for the trade of girls (and boys) who have turned to prostitution to survive.



Salete and Oliver

Lia is an MAI missionary bringing hope to the people of Cape Verde. Her tenacious spirit and bright smile are contagious! Lia spends most of her time traveling around the region teaching and training Community Health Evangelism (CHE) lessons. With over 10,000 lessons, CHE brings solutions to the myriad of problems women, children and men face in Cape Verde.



In 2020, God brought Oliver who is a Cape Verdean and is now serving with Lia. Oliver completed a CHE internship in Ghana and then began her service in Cape Verde as a full-time missionary. She was the first female missionary sent by the Baptist Church in the country. Oliver and Lia have partnered in ministry to lead women’s Bible studies, teach CHE lessons, conduct Creative Evangelism Seminars and do personal discipleship. Many women have been growing in God’s word and enjoying regular fellowship together. Some of the women have even started their own social enterprises while putting into practice the biblical financial management instruction they’ve received. One family who started a small business selling handmade flipflops and other goods began tithing for the first time. They shared with Lia many stories of financial provision and unique ways God has been taking care of their every need. They cried tears of joy as they shared their excitement about being faithful stewards of God’s resources.



### Prayer Points for Cape Verde:

- That more women and families will come to know the Lord and follow Him.
- For marriages to be healthy and brokenness to be restored.
- For children to receive protection and connection to trustworthy adults.
- That financial needs of families will be met and creative solutions to poverty will be found through social enterprises.
- For safety and provision for Lia and Oliver as they serve the people.





# Meet Sharon

Serving in Ethiopia, East Africa



Approximately 27 million Ethiopian people live in poverty. Given the lack of access and control over resources, along with discriminatory traditional customs, women make up a majority of the impoverished.

The fact that 75% percent of women are illiterate compounds the problem. Even though primary education is available, early marriage reduces a girl's chance of having access to higher education. Approximately 75% of Ethiopian girls marry before the age of 17, with 13% marrying between ages 17-21. The rate of female student dropouts is much higher than boys, as girls are often responsible for household responsibilities that interfere with schooling.

Ethiopian culture places women in a subordinate position to the men. Women manage all the work of the home, in addition to the support they provide in agriculture and livestock production. The family arbitration system used for settling inter-household disputes is conducted mainly by older men who want to maintain the subordinate position of women,

resulting in application of gender-biased customary laws. The fact that women are often not well informed of their rights under the law further contributes to their being marginalized.

Sharon is an MAI missionary who has a great burden for people who are hurting, with a large part of her ministry focused on the women in the area. Sharon states, "I have been working with MAI, using CHE for about 12 years. Ethiopian culture has prevented women from enjoying the fruit of their labors. For this reason, I work with the wives and mothers to see their value. Through CHE lessons, they learn positive ways of respecting their husband and applying biblical methods to their daily activities. The biggest challenges are male dominance, backwardness, and lack of knowledge. Women are looked at as second-class citizens, but through my teaching God is working, changing their lives and environments. The hearts of men are also changing. God is working in mighty ways, bringing them from bad traditions back to the Gospel."

## Prayer Points for Ethiopia

- That more women and families will come to know the Lord and follow Him.
- That women will recognize their value, seeing themselves as God sees them.
- For the hearts of the men to change as biblical principles are applied to the marriage.
- For safety and provision for Sharon as she serves the people.





## Meet Miriam

Serving in the Republic of Senegal, West Africa

The Republic of Senegal is a country on the coast of West Africa that borders the North Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, there is not much opportunity for women in this country, as they do not have adequate access to formal education. Many girls are married at around 13-14 years old. They find themselves pregnant at an early age and typically have many children. Domestic violence is commonplace in these marriages.

Miriam is from Chile but grew up in Argentina. She currently serves as an MAI missionary, ministering to the women in Senegal. Using CHE lessons with groups of about fifteen women, Miriam tells them that God created them, and they have an identity in Him. Miriam says, "When we share the stories from the Bible, talking about women of the Bible, we can see how they connect with these stories. They feel like God loves them. I believe God is working with them when we share. It is amazing."



### Prayer Points for the Republic of Senegal:

- That more women and families will come to know the Lord and follow Him.
- That women will recognize their value, seeing themselves as God sees them.
- For the hearts of the men to change as biblical principles are applied to the marriage.
- For safety and provision for Miriam and her family as she serves the people.





# Meet Rosemary

Serving in Zimbabwe, Southeast Africa



Zimbabwe is a beautiful country in tropical Southeast Africa. Its mountainous terrain holds desirable natural resources, such as coal, gold, platinum, nickel, and diamonds. As would be expected, mining is a major industry in this country. Poor mining regulations have a negative impact on the water supply and animal population. Zimbabwe has the fifth largest adult prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the world. In 2020, it was estimated that 1.3 million people in this country were living with HIV/AIDS with an estimated 22,000 deaths due to the disease.<sup>1</sup>

Rosemary was born in Zimbabwe. She became a partner of MAI in 2014 as a CHE trainer. She has trained over seventy women in the area. When asked why she continues to teach CHE, she said, "CHE is about community health, evangelism and education. What I like most about it is that it teaches good health, living in harmony with God, and living in harmony with others, ourselves and our environment. CHE gives us community organization and self-sustainability, such as how to use available resources."

Rosemary has been praying to start CHE in new areas. In 2021 she was nominated by the Epworth Local Board to go to Sweden in 2022 for special advanced training. This was because of the outstanding work being done in the CHE communities where Rosemary is serving. A growing number of people are being born again, health and wellness is improving, and there is harmony where people were previously fighting.



Rosemary celebrates the many successes she is seeing unfold through the Lord's provision and remains prayerful about the myriad of challenges. One such challenge is several CHE community members are not able to send their children to formal schools because the schools are very expensive. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the economy and its businesses. She also expressed the challenge some of the girls are facing with menstruation. The washable pads are not as effective as they should be because water sources are a problem. <sup>1</sup>CIA.gov

### Prayer Points for Zimbabwe:

- That more women and families will come to know the Lord & follow Him.
- For a turn-around for the economy which has been impacted by the pandemic.
- For those who have lost loved ones because of COVID-19.
- That there will be improvement in community health and education.
- For opportunities to share CHE in other communities.
- For safety and provision for Rosemary as she serves the people.



## Meet Winnie

Serving in Kenya, East Africa



The country of Kenya borders the Indian Ocean in East Africa. Kenya has a remarkably substantial risk of infectious disease, such as hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and malaria. In 2020, it was estimated that 1.4 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, resulting in 29,000 deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with poor seasonal rains and desert locusts left an estimated 1 million people with severe food shortages in the March-May 2021 period.<sup>1</sup>

Winnie is a missionary in Kenya, whose key role is coordinating CHE work with an emphasis with women's ministry. When asked about her ministry, she says, "I started to appreciate the role that women play in making a difference in the communities and families and realizing how much potential women have. But beyond that, I also came to realize just how limited they are in accomplishing those roles because they have much less opportunities than men. They are limited in knowledge and opportunity. Poverty affects them more than men. This made me want to reach out to try to lift them up. To be a sister to hold their hand and bring them up so that they can do what God has appointed them to do. I think the greatest challenge for both women and girls is cultural beliefs and expectations, with society giving women a diminishing role. They are not expected to speak in public, they are not valued at all. In fact, when you have a meeting, women and children are seated separate from men. This culture does not allow the potential to come out. Most women and girls do not

have an opportunity to go to school, leaving them illiterate, not knowing how to read or write. This, again, puts them in a lower position. While reproductive health is a basic thing for women, many do not understand their bodies because there is no access to reproductive health medical care."

Winnie believes that CHE provides the greatest opportunity to engage women specifically as individuals, and in group settings where they can air their feelings, contribute to the community and have a voice. CHE programs specifically for women result in increased dignity, as the women feel that they have something to give. Most importantly, they begin to understand that God loves them, and their worth is not based on what society dictates or the community expects, but on what God has placed in them. Winnie adds, "CHE allows them to thrive and see their potential. It opens the heart of potential so it can flow, and the women can be what God created them to be."

<sup>1</sup>CIA.gov

### Prayer Points for Kenya:

- That more women and families will come to know the Lord and follow Him.
- For food security for the families of Kenya
- That women will see themselves as valuable and loved by God.
- For access to medical care that is specific to the women.
- That more women will engage in CHE activities.
- For safety and provision for Winnie and her family as they serve the people of Kenya.



## Meet Bibiana

Serving in the Caribbean & South America

**M**y name is Dr. Bibiana MacLeod. I am a medical doctor from Argentina that worked as a missionary in Haiti initially in curative and evangelistic ministry. While there, I was taught the strategy of Community Health Evangelism (CHE) and moved from clinical work to prevention and discipleship in the community, where I found the power and influence of women to transform their lives and families once they are given the tools to develop. We started by including them in the leadership council of their communities, in saving groups, training them in micro-enterprise, parenting, nutrition and gardening classes, where neighbors teach and model a new way of life to their neighbors. Many of them have become our disciples and co-lead the CHE movement in Haiti, like Evelyne Lamour and Solencia Altidor, leading Children's CHE and Women's Cycle of Life programs in the country.

Most recently Solencia and I have focused on the first 1000 days of life in Haiti, from conception to two years old, teaching

### Prayer Points:

- That the 1000 Days will continue to make an impact among the young women of Haiti.
- For the Lord will help in the fight against human trafficking.
- For an end to child sexual abuse.
- That more churches engage in protecting women and children.

young women of childbearing age, birth attendants and moms to pursue a healthy pregnancy, safe labor, and monitor their baby's growth through regular checkups.

Our MAI Colleague, PH, a certified midwife, has been instrumental in the ongoing training of rural birth attendants and in partnership with the local hospitals. When the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow us to travel to continue teaching, the local team joined the health professionals and have continued the certification process for 20 more birth attendants, reaching a total of 110 people equipped in the past four years. Women also learn how to raise emotionally strong, well-nourished children and are taught to multiply what they learn, not only to neighbors but to their children's children.

We have expanded ministry to fight against human trafficking, launching an initiative to end child sexual abuse. Training includes prevention: equipping parents, children, and teenagers to recognise the dangers of social media, grooming, sexting, and exposure to predators within the family. We equip churches to have a plan to protect people and report the crime. We are raising a new generation of men and women aware and prepared to fight this evil. We are encountering cases of abused children whose parents are paralyzed by the lack of tools to respond in an appropriate manner to the needs and trauma caused by abuse. Through trauma healing sessions we bring them to the realization of their emotional wounds and how they can bring their pain to the cross, where Jesus is offering Himself to those that seek Him.





# Meet Orfa

## Serving in Bolivia and Argentina

In our culture among the Guarani people group, women have long held a very inferior position, causing low self-esteem and little desire to develop their potential. Girls do not have access to education, don't participate in the community, and often have a variety of health problems. As part of large families with many siblings, the girls are often neglected and go without meals.

With the tools introduced through Community Health Evangelism (CHE) for oral cultures, we are helping to develop capacity within girls and women through participatory teachings. They are learning the importance of care in all areas of life, especially as they learn their value and worth in the eyes of God. Once they have this knowledge and are trained in its use, they become very hard working, rising to the challenge of applying the teachings in practical ways.

- They become organized to represent their own local groups.
- Many work with handicrafts that generate income to support their homes.
- They make gardens that improve the diet and nutrition of their children.

- They take responsibility for their families by caring for their children in their own homes.
- They teach Bible stories to their children in the original language of the Guarani, passing on the oral culture.
- Girls are given a place in the community to learn Bible stories and other teachings, making them feel important and valuable.

Things are gradually changing in the Guarani culture. Women are starting to be heard in community gatherings; they are part of the process of building a developing community. CHE teaches them how to develop local leadership, but it can take a lot of time; there are many cultural and spiritual challenges. Because of this, even more people are needed—to join in prayer for the villages and CHE trainers.

Despite the pandemic that has limited our presence in the community, communication and practice are maintained in this oral culture.





# Meet Flor

Serving in Haiti and Dominican Republic



**M**y name is Flor De Leon. I am on staff with Medical Ambassadors International. I live and serve in the Dominican Republic as a Community Health Evangelism (CHE) Trainer. Some mission programs deal solely with the spiritual dimensions and ignore physical needs; others address only the physical. What I love about CHE is that it addresses both! I have the privilege of training people in the Caribbean to learn and start CHE programs. Recently I heard from one of the ladies I trained who has been putting into practice what she has been learning. She sent this testimony about a child sexual abuse intervention in her community.

*My name is Viannes. I am a member of the Community Health Evangelism-CHE in my community. I've been trained and encouraged to teach my neighbors what I've been learning. I took a workshop about child sexual abuse, and how to alert*

*parents and kids about this topic. I discovered I can teach as I was taught. Part of the things I'm involved in my community is working with kids as a Bible teacher. Two of the girls that are attending the class were inappropriately touched by a man of the community. I noticed one child was sad and she was walking strangely, so I went to their mom to speak with her, trying to find out if there had been a problem or situation. The girls told us what had happened; it was a neighbor. Suddenly, one of the girls saw the man on the street. She ran after me shouting "Viannes look! It's him! He was the one who touched me!" Everyone heard her, and now he knows that I know. He knows that he'll be watched. I'm so thankful to God that CHE is helping us to help others. Before the workshop I wouldn't have known how to identify the odd behavior of the kids I work with. I probably wouldn't have known how to have helped this family. The girl was checked by a doctor, the abuser is being watched, and the community was informed about the case. Now, parents are watching over their children better and the kids are being heard. We keep learning, and we are committed to be part of our community transformation.*





**FULL CIRCLE:** *A little displaced girl returns to be part of her homeland's future*

*Submitted by: Andrea C. McAleenan, Ph.D.*

In 1980, a family of 12 began a long walk across rice fields and bamboo jungles in northern Laos, seeking freedom and safety in Thailand. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, a secret civil war was engulfing Laos. Bouarith Khamphouvong, the father, was imprisoned in a "re-education camp" for three and one-half years due to his work with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for 14 years. He escaped by a separate route while his wife, Sangath, placed her children two by two in a small fishing boat and sent them across the Mekong River in the dark of night to a safe house.

The reunited family spent two years in a small bamboo stall in the Nong Khai Refugee Camp undergoing a vetting process that eventually led them to their first place of refuge in Idaho. All through these transitions, a little girl, named Chiraphone,

began to grow in language skills and education. Her strong spirit and determination were a source of concern to some, but her mother was able to understand her unique ability to weave and blend cultures. She encouraged Chiraphone to "be herself," which is the key to her life story.

Thirty-eight years after her family's escape, Chiraphone was led to return to her birthland to serve among her people. Her dream and vision is to live alongside Lao nationals and development workers to assist in researching and implementing strategic opportunities in three areas: education, heritage and economic development. The umbrella organization she founded, Impact Beyond Borders, seeks to catalyze dignified transformation for the Lao people. Her frequent trips serving as a Program Advisor with World Renew Laos to remote villages span diverse

activities as she helps design educational programs to provide access for girls and developing physical and social initiatives for families. Outfitting a small village with toilets was one of the highlights of her efforts in the last two years.

Chiraphone prepared diligently for her return to Pathet Lao through gaining advanced university degrees and serving as Director of Partnerships and Resource Development with World Relief in Cambodia, Director of World Missions at Azusa Pacific University and Volunteering in South Africa with the United States Peace Corps. One of her favorite sayings is: "Service unto others reflects the joy of your soul." Chiraphone lives out her deep conviction of "where much is given, much is required." Hence, she radiates joy to all she meets and inspires the transformational change that is needed in her homeland. Full circle indeed!

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*Chiraphone Khamphouvong, is a Lao escapist and refugee returnee serving back in Lao PDR as a global educator and practitioner towards a more sustainable, decolonizing, and integrative transformational development. Chiraphone is passionate about developing people towards a dignified holistic development and continues to draw from her 38+ countries of global engagement. Since 2018, Chiraphone serves as a Program Advisor with World Renew Laos and is the visionary developer and founder of Impact Beyond Borders. IMPACT is a Lao refugee diaspora movement highlighting an integrative development approach of education, service, and heritage opportunities in Laos.*



## Poverty and Gender

by Beth Clayton Luthye

"Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realize one's full potential as a human being." With these words, the economist Amartya Sen sums up the situation for women and girls in Liberia, which ranks 150 out of 159 countries on the gender inequality index (UNDP, 2015), with only 17 percent of girls receiving any secondary-level schooling.

Ongoing social and spiritual poverty are reinforced by traditional customs that underscore gender inequality: Dowry, or bride price, encourages parents to marry their daughters off early, and child marriage then reinforces unbalanced power dynamics. Girls' education and future opportunities are limited before they are out of their teenage years. In fact, 36 percent of girls in Liberia are married before age 18, according to UNICEF.

Inequality has also led to high rates of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. According to the UN, Liberia's incidence of sexual assault and gender-based violence has risen in recent years, one of the legacies of a brutal civil war. The conflict also worsened economic conditions in Liberia, which currently ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world. Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the economic situation.\*\*

Nazarene churches in Monrovia came together to create the Empowering Women With Dignity project as a way to offer women opportunities to improve their economic conditions and affirm their God-given dignity.

To learn more or support the Empowering Women With Dignity project, visit [ncm.org/liberiawomensempowerment](https://ncm.org/liberiawomensempowerment).  
<https://ncm.org/liberiawomensempowerment>



## Prayer Partner & Ardent Supporter *Lydia Carroll*

I've been associated with Medical Ambassadors International (MAI) since the early 1980's when my husband and I first became aware of the work of MAI when we moved to Modesto. At first, it was more my being supportive of his roles at MAI and our trips to Guatemala. But since 2005, I've been involved with Women's Cycle of Life (WCL) in a very personal way.

I love MAI because all they do takes into consideration the WHOLE person, with the goal of transformation both now and eternally, using Biblical principles for everything. The Bible is the way to salvation, but it also includes principles for abundant life while on earth. The CHE strategy is very powerful and transformational. I also love the MAI people. Each servant is a very important part of our lives.

An aspect of MAI's ministry that is very dear to me is the Women's Cycle of Life program. I have been through a CHE-Training of Trainers (TOT) course. Later, I also was trained as a WCL facilitator, and visited MAI field locations in Guatemala, Uzbekistan, Egypt, India, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, and a couple of places in the United States to pass on the training to others.

I feel so blessed to be a part of MAI's global ministry and have so enjoyed seeing visible transformation in the lives of well over a hundred women as they have understood and comprehended God's purpose in beautifully designing them to fulfill His purpose for their lives!



## *I Was a Stranger*

*submitted by: Saumya Lee, JD*

"I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."  
(Matthew 25:43)

**M**rs. Dimuthi Perera Samarasekera, a preschool director who ran her own school for over 25 years, was busy leading various ministries in the largest Baptist church in Sri Lanka, when she was called by God to minister to female prisoners. Unlike prisons in the Western World, Sri Lanka's prison conditions are pitiful, where women slept sideways on bare cement floors because of overcrowding and often stayed incarcerated indefinitely for minor infractions due to an inability to pay bail. Dimuthi, together with the (Christian) Prison Fellowship, has worked tirelessly to show the love of God to these women and their children, young and school

aged. Children up to age 5 accompany their mothers to jail but do not receive any education or other services.

Visiting female prisons was not always allowed to volunteer organizations like the Prison Fellowship. Jails outside of the capital, Colombo, often suffered as well; the distance added transportation costs for these volunteers. Despite a lack of robust support, the Prison Fellowship operates entirely on donations and receives no government or international funding. Currently, Dimuthi oversees the Scholarship Program, which aims to fund the education of prisoners' children and thus avert generational poverty and reimprisonment. Below is the story of a woman of God who was willing to sacrifice personal comfort to help prisoners and, despite wrenchingly difficult life events, praise and glorify Him.

Dimuthi was blessed to be born to parents whose faith and indefatigable work in the church and in the broader Christian community in Colombo, Sri Lanka, was her shining example. Her childhood was filled with love and laughter, while those who know her recall her radiant beauty and kindness to all who met her. An idyllic life, one supposes, but God ultimately led her on a very different road. She married early at age 22 and was soon blessed with two daughters. She was a Preschool and Sunday School teacher but preferred serving backstage. However, after apprehensively agreeing to be president of the Women's Fellowship, she went on to be a Deacon, Church Secretary (British term for the lay administrative leader) and served in many other roles.

Doubtless, her community found her mix of humility, congeniality, and bedrock sense of responsibility perfect for leadership. Looking back, says Dimuthi, she cannot believe she did it all: "I was a weak vessel and if there was anything I achieved, it was through God's grace and nothing else." It was during her time as leader of the Women's Fellowship that she heard the call to serve "in the gutters," where the speaker referred to female prisons. "It was not a bed of roses," says Dimuthi as she went through "rejection, heartbreak, persecution and loneliness. I wanted to trust everyone but realized that was not possible." Yet, she has faithfully helped these women, loving them through visits, encouragement, hugs, gifts of soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other necessities not supplied by the prison system.

Her present work in heading the Scholarship Fund shows God's impeccable planning in combining her gentle empathy and enduring love for children with her desire to serve women marginalized by society.

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## Hope is a Verb: Empowering Women with Dignity in Liberia

by Nell Becker Sweeden

*And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.* Romans 5:3-5 NRSV

I was reminded recently of the tenacity that Christian hope involves. This kind of hope—the hope that persists—is something we all need right now.

In being a truly global church, the call in Scripture for the people of God to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice

with those who rejoice is no small thing. We live in a highly connected world, and so we feel deeply when disaster strikes our brothers and sisters in Christ and when our faith communities are struggling with unjust systems and poverty. These days, it seems that the crises compound and compound again, and while there still is much joy to celebrate, there also is deep pain and suffering in the body of Christ around the world.

The references to hope in God run deep in Scripture and in the experiences of God's people. Here, hope is not presented as a passing feeling, or even something we train ourselves to dwell on. It is not the will to think more positively, or

even being optimistic about the future in the midst of pain. Rather, hope is an active force. It wells up within us as a deep motivation and conviction that then propels us on to change and transformation in our personal lives and in our life as the Body of Christ. Hope is a verb.

Precisely in the hard times, many communities of women gather to enact their hope in Jesus—a hope that runs deep into their being and transforms all that they do. Thanks be to God!

Churches in Monrovia, Liberia, are coming together to foster hope and unleash the potential of women through vocational training and Christian community. The Empowering Women With Dignity project offers women opportunities to improve their economic conditions and affirm their God-given dignity.

*Louise, 40, enrolled in a tailoring class created by the women's empowerment initiative at Grace Chapel. In their home near Monrovia, she and her husband care for six children, ages 5 to 13, including three who are children of relatives. Her husband works hard as a math teacher, but they can't afford to meet the children's needs on a teacher's salary.*

*Louise has what she calls "a little business" selling coal, but tailoring skills will allow her to start a more profitable and sustainable business.*

*With tailoring skills, Louise says, "I can pay for tuition, clothes, food, and shelter for my children. It's difficult now because I'm not making much income."*

*Her hope for the children in her care is "to see them doing better, to be better educated. I want them to be self-sufficient. I want a better future for my family."*

*Louise notes that most of the women in her neighborhood "want their children to have a future, but they don't have a way to do that."*

*Through this project, three churches serve as centers that offer vocational courses, savings groups, and life-skills workshops. In addition to tailoring, women come to learn catering, soap making, and fabric design. And what is more, Louise now serves as director of the center in her town, inspiring women like her with vocational and life skills and a heart for the Lord.<sup>1</sup>*

Hope is not something we clutch to our chest and feel lucky or fortunate to have. Rather, hope is what gives us the strength to break down the door in an emergency. It is digging deep—deeper than you have ever dug—into your gut to summon the strength to rescue another, to get out of the clutches of darkness, to climb out of the pit of despair.

Hope is necessary because our world needs rescue.

The women involved in this project are sowing the seeds of hope for their families and their community. They seek to nurture it in others by sharing new messages of possibility through dignity and job skill and hope in their one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a commitment to live fully in the present to make a better future.

Hope is human fortitude that stands up against the weight of suffering and exploitation. Hope challenges the path of death and destruction. Hope does not come after pain, but lives through it. Hope resides in the midst of deep suffering and does not run away from it. It is the result of a tenacious faith in God—an always seeking, ever deepening journey of faith.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this article appeared in Beth Clayton Luthye, "Tailoring for Success" NCM Magazine 2018, Issue 2, pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Portions of this article appeared in Nell Becker Sweeden, "The Necessity of Hope," NCM Magazine, 2020, Issue 2, p. 4.

To learn more or support the Empowering Women With Dignity project, visit <https://ncm.org/liberianwomens empowerment>



Nell Becker Sweeden has been serving with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries since 2004 and is presently the International Director, as well as CEO of NCM, Inc.

Nell holds a PhD in Practical Theology from Boston University and is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. Nell is author of *Church on the Way: Hospitality and Migration* and serves as Affiliate Professor of Contemporary Theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Nell and her husband, Josh (Academic Dean of Nazarene Theological Seminary), have two children and live in Kansas.



## Call to Action: Empowering Women at the Grass Roots Level

*by Ravi I Jayakaran, President of MAI*

**I**nternational Women's Day<sup>1</sup> is an annual, well-celebrated day in much of the world. It is also an opportunity for Christians to reflect upon the role of women throughout history as well as today. It is a time to realize that in many places, women are still seen as second-class citizens without much worth. Scriptures do not line up with this thinking.

The Old Testament praises women who served in important influential leadership roles. In addition to their value as wives and mothers, Scripture recognizes their leadership and God's blessing on them. There is no mention that their gender should disqualify them.

In the New Testament, we find Jesus demonstrating high regard for the women who followed him. Jesus valued their fellowship, prayers, service, financial support, testimony, and witness. He honored women, taught women, and ministered to women.

In Romans 16:3-4, Paul mentions Priscilla and Aquila as fellow workers who risked their lives for the Gospel. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them". Paul also commends Junia in Romans 16:7.

She worked so closely with Paul that she suffered as a fellow prisoner. Paul ends Romans 16 with warm and personal greetings of thanks for the service and sacrifice of several women.

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. But today gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnates social progress. Inequalities faced by girls can begin at birth and follow them all their lives. In some countries, girls are deprived of access to education, protection from violence, health care and nutrition, and control of finance. Each of these areas is critical for their empowerment.

### Education

Around the world, 129 million girls do not attend school, including 32 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67 million of upper-secondary school age. In countries affected by conflict, girls are more than twice as likely to be unschooled than girls living in non-affected countries.



Only 49% of countries have achieved equal school attendance among boys and girls in primary education. At the secondary

level, the gap widens: 42 percent of countries have achieved gender parity in lower secondary education, and 24 percent in upper secondary education. The reasons are many. Barriers to girls' education – like poverty, child marriage and gender-based violence – vary among countries and communities. Poor families often favor boys when investing in education. In some places, schools do not meet the safety, hygiene or sanitation needs of girls. In others, teaching practices are not gender-responsive and result in gender gaps in learning and skills development. Gender-equitable education systems can contribute to reductions in school-related gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation.<sup>2</sup>

## Violence

Worldwide, 35% of women between 15-49 years of age have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. In the 30 countries in Africa and the Middle East



where female genital mutilation is most common, one out of three girls aged 15-19 has experienced some form of this harmful practice. Along with emotional trauma, the girls also have high risk of prolonged bleeding, infection (including exposure to HIV), future childbirth complications, infertility, and death. The COVID-19 lockdown further caused domestic violence to increase in many countries, showing the critical importance of social protection for women and girls.<sup>3</sup>

Learn more about MAI's Anti-Trafficking Program.



## Health

Women's health and safety is another important area. This can be related to women having fewer opportunities for health education, less power and autonomy, and gender-



based violence. In many countries, women have limited access to prenatal and infant care, and are more likely to experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth. This is a critical concern in countries

where girls marry and have children before they are ready; often well before the age of 18. Quality maternal health care can provide an important entry point for information and services that empower mothers as informed decision-makers concerning their own health and the health of their children.<sup>4</sup>

Improvements in nutrition, hygiene and health care have resulted in fewer maternal deaths but women continue to die from preventable pregnancy-related causes. The World Health Organization estimates that annually 295,000 women still die from pregnancy-related causes (810 per day). The highest risk areas are southern Africa and south Asia. HIV/AIDS remains an impactful issue for women.<sup>5</sup>

## Economy

Though women comprise more than 50% of the world's population, they only own a fraction of the world's wealth. Throughout the world, women and girls perform long hours of unpaid domestic work. In some places, women still lack rights to own land or to inherit property, obtain access to credit, earn income, or to move up in their workplace, free from job discrimination. At all levels, including at home and in the public arena, women are widely underrepresented as decision-makers, and lack the power to influence the finances of their family income.<sup>6</sup>



## Medical Ambassadors International (MAI) is making a difference at the grass roots level

This issue of the Healing Lives magazine has stories and examples of women leaders, working with MAI and with other agencies, who have labored diligently at the grass roots level to address these four critical areas in the lives of the women in the community. As a part of Community Health Evangelism (CHE), MAI uses the Women's Cycle of Life (WCL) to show women their value as humans and as valuable persons in the eyes of God. As the women come to this knowledge, the result is often empowerment, a growth of confidence and joy, bringing transformation for them, their families, and ultimately to the whole community. (See page 7 in this issue for details about WCL)

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Looking forward to the Fall issue of Healing Lives as we highlight the work going on for those who are Beautifully Enabled as well as other programs.

If you missed the event, scan the QR code here.



Woman by God's Design was a special online event. To hear the program, scan the QR code below.

Medical Ambassadors has a monthly newsletter. If you'd like to subscribe go to [www.MedicalAmbassadors.org](http://www.MedicalAmbassadors.org)

