

E-BULLETIN #63

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

item 119

Birregurra to Bangalore

Mary Glowrey was born on 23rd June 1887 in the small township of Birregurra in Victoria, Australia. The family relocated to Watchem in the Mallee region when Mary was five. When Mary was thirteen, she won a scholarship to attend school at South Melbourne College. She graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1910 with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery.



Mary Glowrey completed her residency in New Zealand before returning to build her own successful private practice in Melbourne. She also worked at St Vincent's Hospital—where she had gained invaluable clinical experience as a medical student—as the Physician to Outpatients, and at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. Despite her spiritual humility and reticence, Mary Glowrey was elected as the founding President of the Catholic Women's Social Guild (now known as the Catholic Women's League of Victoria and Wagga Wagga) in 1916. This inspired group of young Catholic women sought to change society through prayer and action. During this time, Mary also studied for a higher medical degree with a particular emphasis on obstetrics, gynaecology and ophthalmology. She became a Doctor of Medicine in December 1919.

A chance reading of a pamphlet about the appalling death rate amongst babies in India, and the desperate need for medical missionaries, fundamentally changed the direction of her life. In 1920, Mary Glowrey left her thriving career and sailed for India to become a medical missionary with the Congregation of the Society of Jesus Mary Joseph in Guntur. Pope Pius XI bestowed a special blessing on her medical work and **Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart**, as Mary Glowrey was then known, became the first nun-doctor missionary.

Mary Glowrey placed the remainder of her life at the service of the medical and spiritual needs of the people of India, as an expression of her own deeply held love for God and for humanity. Recognising the vital need to promote the Christian use of medicine, Mary founded the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) in 1943, which has become one of the largest non-government health care providers in the world. Her vision was the establishment of a Catholic medical college in India to train health professionals whose medical care would be grounded in an understanding of the absolute inviolability of human life, and placed at the service of life.

Mary Glowrey was said to radiate Christ by word and example. The poor were the people of her choice and incurable patients had a special place in her heart. Mary never attempted anything without praying to the Holy Spirit, knowing that with the help of the Holy Spirit all things are possible. For the last two years of her life, she shouldered the Cross of excruciating physical pain which she bore with extraordinary courage and patience.

Mary died in Bangalore on Sunday, 5th May 1957. Her last words were: “Jesus, Mary and Joseph” and “My Jesus, I love you”.

“There is but one question. Does our Lord want me to do this for Him?” Dr Mary Glowrey, 2 November 1916

“It is up to Him to point the way and for me to follow.” Dr Mary Glowrey, 2 November 1916

‘I can never sufficiently express the gratitude I owe to St Vincent’s Hospital.’ 1957



Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to let you know that on Wednesday, 27th March 2013, at the Chrism Mass in the Diocese of Guntur, India, Bishop Bali Gali will declare Dr Sister Mary Glowrey a “Servant of God” as the commencement of the diocesan phase of the process for possible Beatification.

Mary Glowrey was a gifted doctor

You are asked to bring this significant development to the notice of your people and to invite their prayers for the progress of the Cause.

Attached to this email is a brief outline of her life.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Archbishop of Melbourne
www.cam.org.au

item 120

Sr Julienne has change of heart

AFTER her first exposure to the crowded chaos of early 1990s Bangladesh, Marist Missionary (SMSM) **Sister Julienne Hayes-Smith** nearly didn't return. And that would have been a terrible tragedy for the thousands of Bangladeshi women helped through the **Caritas Safe Motherhood Project** she set up several years after her return to the country in 1996. Her non-return also would have deprived those at

Caritas Australia's recent Ash Wednesday Project Compassion launch in Brisbane of a truly inspirational vision of Christian charity extended to "the very least of God's children".

After the launch, reflecting on her initial impressions of Bangladesh, New Zealand-born Sr Julienne said: "I just found the sheer number of people was frightening. It all seemed so aggressive and imposing upon me. I used to walk around Dhaka city with an umbrella opened in front of me - just to get my own personal space. What added to this feeling was that for two years previous I'd been stationed on the very remote Chatham Islands (east of New Zealand's South Island). I remember going on my first home leave after three years and thinking: 'I won't want to go back to Bangladesh'. Then I was driving around the streets of Auckland when it suddenly occurred to me, all the people in the left lane are going left and the right are going right and everything's in order. And it suddenly occurred to me - 'Julie, chaos is for you'. That was the turning point and after that I loved the place."



Sr Julienne said she had been "always attracted to supporting poor people in other parts of the world". Part of this came from reading National Geographic magazines as a fascinated youngster. "An elderly lady nearby used to give us the magazines and I would look at the people, especially those who were very different to us and poorer than us," she said. "I felt a calling to spend my life in service to these people - though at first I didn't want to respond."

When she was about 20, having started studies in nursing and working in New Zealand's Palmerston Hospital, she approached the Marist Missionaries order. "At that time when I spoke to the Sisters they said, 'Given that you will be going to the missions it might be better to go first, see what you want to do and then come back!'"

"So I became a postulant - went to Samoa for a while and discovered I also really loved teaching and had a natural gift." Eventually she would become a registered nurse and midwife with a Diploma of Education in Nurse Education and a Master of Philosophy in Development.

Skills gained from these studies as well as her affinity for poor and oppressed women, set her on the path to establishing the Safe Motherhood Project. The tin-shed health centre where Sr Julienne started her ministry to the women of Bangladesh "was only about 25 miles (40.2km) as the crow flies from the city of Dhaka". She lived in the shed with another SMSM Sister, two local Sisters and a New Zealand Religieuses de Notre Dame des Missions Sister. Often over the years, doctors and nurses would spend time with the community.

With her newly found love of Bangladesh, Sr Julienne found in the chaos "so much vibrancy of life". "When you let go and let the place be what it is, you start really learning to love the people," she said. "And you see the suffering, the enormous suffering of the really poor things I had never seen in my life before. Then, somehow you become very attached because you realise you're also growing a lot and being in a situation like that."

Asked about a particularly powerful insight gained in this field, Sr Julienne's answer was enlightening. "What struck me as never before was what it means to believe in the Incarnation - that God became one of us, took on our form and therefore every human being is sacred."

"Bangladesh is a country where Christians are less than one-quarter of one per cent. It's a largely Islamic country with quite a few Hindus and some Buddhists so people would always notice our work and say to

me: 'You know Christians are always kind people'. I would think where does that come from? It comes because we believe that whatever we do to another is really important to God."



Sr Julienne Hayes-Smith with women in Fulbaria Bangladesh where she helped train midwives and worked closely with Caritas to reduce maternal mortality

Sr Julienne also came to realise there was a limit to how many people she could help in a country where there were so many needy people. "I hated in the beginning walking past people begging or lying on the street and you're not able to do it (help)," she said. "But I would recall Mother Teresa's insight that even if you have no material goods you can give your love, a smile ... In the beginning I wanted to race past them all, I felt so uncomfortable. Then I realised - you give yourself to these people, you show your love and respect for them. And as Mother Teresa would say, even if you can make a difference for one person, it's been worthwhile."

This vision was to inspire Sr Julienne to eventually extend primary health care and health education to many thousands of poor

young women working long hours for tiny wages in the garment industry. She also helped the street people who made their living collecting rubbish and the slum dwellers, all cared for at the Notre Dame Sick Shelter in Dhaka.

Together with Provarty Rozario, and with funding support from Caritas Bangladesh, she also began the Safe Motherhood Project. The project developed in response to the fact that every hour in Bangladesh three women were dying of pregnancy-related causes and a further 300 women were being left with lifelong disabilities. As Sr Julienne explained at the Project Compassion launch in Queen Street Mall, this disastrous state of affairs was largely due to harmful beliefs and practices in poor and largely uneducated communities. "When a woman was bleeding badly, those present would just sit around and pray for her while she died," she said. "They would also rub cow manure on the umbilical cord after the baby was born. This was done because they used manure to seal their houses and thought they could do the same for the baby. However, this practice caused infection."

Sr Julienne told those at the launch many women from remote, disadvantaged communities had been trained as midwives under the Safe Motherhood Project. "It's a small project but it's having a lot of impact," she said. Over the past 14 years we've been able to train traditional birth attendants plus younger, more educated women as rural midwives - probably around 824 to date. I'm very proud to be able to say no woman has died under the care of these midwives trained by Caritas."

Sr Julienne will be in Australia for the next couple of years on her congregation's leadership team. Perhaps inevitably, the final question for this dedicated woman is whether she will return to Bangladesh in years to come. "Australia's a wonderful land but I'm very happy as soon as I can to get back to Bangladesh," she said. "I'm a better person for having known these people. The women and infants there remain every day very much in my heart and my prayer."

used with permission – report by Paul Dobbyn

03 March 2013

courtesy THE CATHOLIC LEADER, Brisbane, Qld - www.catholicleader.com.au