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Charles W. Westerbeck

B.J. O'Loughlin

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The Mission Doctors Association, Inc.

CHARLES W. WESTERBECK, M.D., M.P.H. AND B. J. O'LOUGHLIN, M.D., PH.D.

... *heal the sick who are there and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand to you.'*

St. Luke Chapter X vs. 10

In the spring of 1959 the Catholic Physicians' Guild of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles held its first annual symposium. A Monsignor, unknown to most of the doctors present, strode to the podium at intermission and told them of the needs of the mission lands for doctors. In the ensuing lively discussion, he pointed out that the life of a mission doctor need not be that of a "medicine man" in the bush but would more likely be that of a Catholic Albert Schweitzer since hospitals, clinics, etc. were ready and only waiting for doctors to staff them. Interest in this challenge was such that the Guild president appointed a Medical Mission Committee to develop a program for the Guild and for the missions.

Msgr. Anthony J. Brouwers, spiritual advisor to the Christines, Director of the Propagation of the Faith and founder of the Lay-Mission-Helpers even then was suffering from multiple myeloma. He died in 1964, his work well started but far from finished. He had dedicated himself to the mission of Christ in pagan lands. His travels through the mission countries convinced him that the job was too large for the few clergy available. He felt the critical need for apostolic laymen.

He had found hundreds of hospitals without doctors and inadequate staffs of nurses and technicians. Many of these hospitals were well equipped but idle for lack of the necessary trained personnel. Most of the hospitals were built for doctors who,

because of lack of an organized plan, and particularly because they had no adequate preparation, left prematurely after a few weeks, a few months or perhaps even a year. In most instances, the local Bishops had been unable to find replacements, even though they had gone to considerable effort to do so by appeal in the United States and Europe. Many of these hospitals were now run by a Sister nurse and some were closed down completely.

During his worldwide mission tours, the Bishops asked Msgr. Brouwers to help them recruit doctors, nurses and other paramedical personnel. Some even promised to build and equip a new complete hospital where there was no such facility available. The Bishops further promised to supply suitable housing, local transportation and in many instances, even food and a small stipend if only Msgr. Brouwers could find the people who would come and stay for at least two or three years.

Several years previously Msgr. Brouwers had founded the Lay-Mission-Helpers to recruit, train, contract for and send lay apostles to the African missions. When he appeared before the Physicians' Guild, he felt that the time had come to recruit medical help. Dr. James V. Maloney was appointed first chairman of the Medical Mission Committee. Dr. Maloney, Professor of Surgery at UCLA, and his committee were so successful in their development that their activity was soon greater than that of the parent Guild.

Thus began the Mission Doctors

Association. Dr. Richard Lescoe was first president. Its initial duties were in screening examinations of the Lay Mission Helpers who were going overseas. Soon one doctor volunteered for overseas duty, then two, then three. The movement gained momentum. It also gained approval. Cardinal McIntyre, Bishop Sheen, then Cardinal Agagianian and the Propaganda Fides joined the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in approval of M.D.A. It was incorporated in the State of California as a lay, religious, charitable organization of doctors. Donations are tax deductible. M.D.A. is governed by an executive committee and Board of Directors. The active membership includes some interested non-medical laymen, a few "paramedical" people, chiefly doctors and numbers approximately seventy, all active in various committees. Financial support comes from about 200 contributing members (Mission Doctors Aids) and an annual Benefit Dinner Dance at the Knollwood Country Club.

All funds collected are used to pay for transportation of the lay medical mission helpers, their families and personal effects to and from the missions, to help with insurance and a small monthly stipend and minimal operating expenses. All help is donated to the organization on a voluntary, gratis basis. Thus everyone involved shares in the good work.

The unique character of M.D.A. lies chiefly in the fact that recruits must undergo a period of well planned spiritual preparation of at least nine months. During this time the prospective missionaries must live in or near Los Angeles, where the classes are conducted. The Board is ready and able to help them where necessary with transportation, housing, and to find employment—usually in a local hospital, so that they can continue to support their own families, and in

some cases increase their medical proficiency.

Since the Lay Mission Helpers training program was already established, and in order not to duplicate these efforts, aspirants to the medical missions receive the same spiritual formation as the L. M. H. members. In conjunction some special preparation is given in tropical medicine, languages, and missiology. Lay medical mission helpers follow the same Rule of Life which was written by Msgr. Brouwers and they also wear the special ring which proclaims, "For we are God's helpers."

The classes are conducted on Wednesday and Friday nights and one on Sunday afternoons which is followed by a social hour and dinner. The Course occupies about 10 clock hours a week. Lectures are given by Msgr. Laubacher and his assistant, Father O'Leary and a missionary priest of the White Fathers Society, as well as presentations by visiting missionaries and returned L.M.H.'ers. The areas of study are in aesthetic theology, moral theology, missiology and language. Those who have completed the training and have served as missionaries are unanimous in their agreement that the Courses are essential for all who would wish to go to the missions. Even had they not been able to go overseas they would have been extremely thankful for this opportunity because it provided them a completely new life of dedication to Christ.

During the doctors' stay here in Los Angeles, final selection is made. Arrangements are also made with the responsible missionary Bishops; permits to practice, and visas are secured. This requires several months. After all of these details are completed, packing and crating, shipping, procuring insurance, etc., etc., follow. It is especially at this time that the lay mission-

aries appreciate the help of M.D.A. and L.M.H. who have had a considerable experience and have standard procedures established to solve these problems. At first, these nine months seem to be a long period but actually the days are so full of preparation that they pass quickly.

Lay medical mission helpers usually volunteer for three year terms; after which they are brought home. If they should desire to return, another contract is negotiated for a second or third term of three-years each. Some wish to spend a lifetime, but after three years they deserve a rest back home, and an opportunity to visit relatives and friends. Furthermore, they need a brief respite.

To date five physicians and one dentist have been sent with their families to Africa. Four are presently working there, two in Southern Rhodesia at Driefontein Mission and two at Malawi (formerly Nyasaland), one at Likuni Mission, the other at Namitete Mission. Two others have completed their tours and have returned home.

In Southern Rhodesia are Dr. and Mrs. James Carey and their five children. Jim is a well-qualified surgeon and he now operates a modern 300 bed tuberculosis sanatorium and a fine new 150 bed general hospital. Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Kirby are also at Driefontein. Joe is a dentist who is also trained in anesthesiology. Madeline, his wife, is a registered nurse who works in the hospital.

These two hospitals were opened and operated by Tom Bain, M.D. (one of our first Mission Doctors).

Dr. and Mrs. Bain and their six children recently returned to the United States after almost three and a half years in Central Africa where they did outstanding work. The Shona tribesmen there in Southern Rhodesia know what true Christian charity is

because they have now experienced it thanks to the Bains.

These hospitals are also staffed by Lay Mission Helpers, paramedical personnel and some German Dominican nurses and lay nurses from Switzerland.

At Likuni Mission in Malawi are Dr. Herb Sorensen and his wife Doris and their four children. Dr. Sorensen is a qualified obstetrician and gynecologist and Doris is a registered nurse. Herb is the only doctor at the 200 bed general hospital and has several satellite hospitals which must be visited periodically. He also has the responsibility for a school of nursing and midwifery. It is one of the few in Malawi and their graduates are usually in the top of the class on those taking the national examinations. The Sorensen family is known and loved by everyone, and has been at Likuni for the past 19 months.

Namitete, a mission approximately 35 miles from Likuni is staffed by Jim Fitzgerald, M.D. With him is his wife Dolores and their baby daughter born in Africa just after their arrival a year ago. Jim is a general practitioner whose love for people and confidence in God is readily apparent to all who meet him. His wife Dolores is not a nurse but is a very resourceful woman who besides being a mother and wife is conducting English lessons for the Carmelite sisters who come from Luxembourg. Jim and Dolores were previously assigned to a mission among the Navajos in Arizona where they will long be remembered and loved.

M.D.A. has a policy that involves thorough screening of the mission areas before a location is selected. Several years ago, most of the missionary Bishops in the world were sent questionnaires inquiring in considerable detail about their medical needs, facilities and equipment. The answers

supplied M.D.A. with a great deal of background material, especially when added to personal information acquired by Msgr. Brouwers from his visits. The present director of the Society for Propagation of the Faith and his assistant have also visited these missions on several occasions and last year one of M.D.A.'s Board of Directors (CWW) was sent on a fact finding tour of Africa where he evaluated the hospitals and general conditions in a great number of "bush missions."

This information has strengthened the resolution that once the responsibility for a mission hospital has been accepted, it will be kept staffed and functioning efficiently before any new enterprises will be started. So far, thank God, M.D.A. has been able to keep this promise. The only way that M.D.A. can expand to new areas will be by having an increasing number of recruits. In fact, M.D.A. is now at a point where it must have more new members in order to be certain of replacing those doctors who are already in Africa. Dr. Sorensen's term will be completed in one year; Dr. Fitzgerald's in two years and Dr. Kirby this spring. Dr. Carey still has 2½ more years. There is one physician each for this year's and next year's classes and many more are urgently needed.

With proper publicity and recruiting, M.D.A. should be able to find five or ten physicians each year who will volunteer these few years to serve as instruments of Christ; as Medical Missionaries. M.D.A. has a very complete program—it just needs people. It is still working on its first objec-

tive, that of sending physicians and dentists to the missions. Eventually, as it grows stronger and more self-sufficient M.D.A. may be able to assume a second objective to staff mission hospitals completely with lay medical mission helpers. Nevertheless, doctors, nurses and other paramedically trained people owe much to the L.M.H. organization and we wish to keep the close association with the Lay Mission Helpers since they presently recruit, train, and send paramedical personnel and give us priority in their assignment.

As M.D.A. grows, there is an ever increasing need for Mission Doctors Aids to pay for ever mounting expenses. Not everyone is called to go to the missions but everyone is asked to help by furthering His work. M.D.A. is a layman's medical missionary organization that gives an opportunity for all, priest and publican, to share in this work of healing the sick and furthering Christ's mission. M.D.A. can supply a speaker with appropriate visual material for organizational meetings and can mail literature to interested groups or individuals.

Msgr. Brouwers used to say that, "Nothing succeeds like success." Thanks to Almighty God, and through the Monsignor's planning, screening of sites and personnel, and thorough spiritual training, M.D.A. has succeeded modestly in these past five and one-half years. God willing, it will continue to grow into a stronger and more efficient, more successful instrument of His love.