

# MOTHER TERESA – NURSE AND WOMAN HEALER

## MATKA TERESA – PIEŁĘGNIARKA I UZDROWICIELKA

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives.** Literature proves that there is a difference between healing and curing. The aim of this study is to prove this hypothesis by exemplifying the life and achievements of Mother Teresa and her significant contributions to the society.

**Methods.** Literature research will be conducted to provide a historical background for the time period in which this nurse healer of Mother Teresa practised.

**Material.** Religious, political and sexual influences of Mother Teresa were subjected to a discussion and reflections upon those topics will be presented.

**Conclusions.** A short summary of Mother Teresa's biography will be presented. The author will identify the accomplishments made by this healer and a public health nurse. Evaluation of the merits will be presented in historical context.

KEYWORDS: Mother Teresa, nurse, healer.

### STRESZCZENIE

**Cel.** Literatura podaje, że istnieje różnica między leczeniem a uzdrawianiem. Celem tego artykułu jest potwierdzenie tej hipotezy za pomocą prezentacji życia i osiągnięć Matki Teresy i jej wkładu dla społeczeństwa.

**Metody.** Materiał został zebrany wykorzystując przegląd naukowy piśmiennictwa, aby udostępnić historyczne informacje z okresu działalności pielęgniarki i uzdrowicielki Matki Teresy.

**Materiał.** W pracy zostały poddane dyskusji religijne, polityczne i seksualne poglądy Matki Teresy oraz refleksje nad tymi poglądami.

**Wnioski.** W artykule została zaprezentowana krótka biografia życia Matki Teresy. Autor zidentyfikował osiągnięcia Matki Teresy jako uzdrowicielki i pielęgniarki środowiskowej. Ocena zasadności została przedstawiona w kontekście historycznym.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Matka Teresa, pielęgniarka, uzdrowicielka.

### Introduction

Fawcett in 1984 defined metaparadigm in nursing as four dimensions: person, environment, health and nursing. Health is characterized by a degree of wellness that a person is experiencing. Nursing can be described as an action or qualities presented by a person providing care in the context of interaction of a person and his/her environment [1]. One of the greatest nursing theorists, Jane Watson, proclaims that the disease might be cured, but illness would remain because without caring, health is not attained and healing does not occur [2]. Many of us struggle with understanding what really healers do. What is the difference in between healing and curing, do all doctors and nurses automatically constitute healers? Literature and history present many aspects and differences between healing and providing care. Kenny in 2012 [3] goes into performing a literature review on what healers are, the qualities and attributes and the journeys that they go through as healers. He describes the various aspects of healing in that healers have an innate force for the 'greater force'.

### Beginning

*'There is a light in this world, a healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. We some-*

*times lose sight of this force when there is suffering, too much pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways'* (Mother Teresa).

Mother Teresa was born on August 26, 1910, in Skopje, Macedonia. Her true name was Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu. Agnes was the youngest of the three children. Her Catholic and economically stable household were the pillars of her later strong leadership and charity. Agnes lost her father at an early age and her mother continued to raise her children with a stance of sharing and compassion towards the less fortunate. Regardless of being wealthy kids, they were raised by their parents to share with others [4, 5].

As a young woman Agnes was involved in 'Solidary'. Solidary was a youth group in her local parish led by Jesuit fathers. In 1928, an 18-year-old Agnes Bojaxhiu heard her calling for the first time to become a nun. Agnes left her home county and travelled to Ireland to join the Loreto Sisters of Dublin. There she took the name after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and was called Sister Teresa. In May 1931 Sister Teresa took her first vows as the Catholic missionary nun during her novitiate period in Darjeeling, India. From there she was sent to Calcutta to teach at Saint Mary's High School for Girls. Sister

Teresa learned to speak Bengali and Hindi so she could teach geography and history. In May 24, 1937 Sister Teresa took her Final Profession of Vows. She gave her life then to serve the poor, to chastity and obedience. At that time she also took a designation of a “Mother” and since then was called Mother Teresa [6, 7].

In 1944 Mother Teresa became the principal of the school. September 10, 1946. She followed her second calling. She asked Vatican to leave her convent to work with the poorest of the poor on streets of Calcutta. In January 1948 Vatican allowed Mother Teresa to follow her new calling. In August Agnes left the Loreto convent. Dressed in the blue and white sari she entered into six months of basic medical training. After she was finished with her training she entered the slums of Calcutta with no specific goal but to help ‘*the unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for*’ [4, 6, 7].

### Slumps of Calcutta

Starting in slumps of Calcutta mother Teresa opened a school to teach underprivileged kids. She also managed to convince city authorities to give her one of the rundown buildings to start and establish a home for the dying. The Missionaries of Charity congregation, that she established, constituted of her former students and colleagues. The Missionaries of Charity would walk through the streets of Calcutta and bring people who were dying to the home for the dying. There the people would receive a cot and nuns would care for them. The dying had opportunity for a peaceful death surrounded by caring nuns that would respect their religious rituals regardless of their faith [4–7].

Mother Teresa also was passionate about caring for unwanted children and in 1955 the first children’s orphanage was open. The Missionaries of Charity looked to care for those children until they were placed up for adoption and those that did not find new home stayed and received education and home until they became independent. During that time Mother Teresa also opened the Leprosy Fund and formed Leprosy Day. That fund was created to help educate the public about the disease of leprosy. In September 1957 first leper clinics were opened. Diseased patients with leprosy were offered medical care and medical supplies like bandages and medicine. In the mid-1960s she also created a work place for people infected with leprosy. That place was called ‘Shanti Nagar’, in translation ‘The Place of Peace’ [4–8].

The Mother Teresa Missionaries of Charity were growing and before their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Vatican gave them permission to extend their work outside of Calcutta. Missionaries opened new houses for dying and orphanages were opened all over India. Five years later Vatican allowed the Missionaries of Charity to expend

internationally. The first international house of dying was opened in Venezuela. In the United States in 1985 the first AIDS hospice was established in Bronx New York [5, 6, 8, 9].

In 1979 the Missionaries of Charity Fathers and Brothers were established. In 1984 Father Joseph Langford took over Charities of Fathers and by then the mission spread throughout the globe to many nations including the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. In 1990 the Missionary of Charities had at least 4,500 sisters working in 133 countries and there were at least a million followers of Mother Teresa in at least 40 countries. By the time of Mother Teresa’s life ended, there were 610 missions in approximately 100 countries, including houses for dying, orphanages, AIDS hospices and nursing homes [5, 9].

### Political, Religious and Sexual Views

Mother Teresa, being Catholic, strictly followed Catholic beliefs and values. She believed in marriage and no divorce. She showed her strong opinion on that subject in 1995. During that time she publicly supported the vote for single marriage and no divorce. She said she would vote ‘no’ during the Irish referendum to end the country’s constitutional ban on divorce and remarriage [9].

Mother Teresa was also against abortion and contraception. In 1979, during her Nobel lecture, she stated: ‘I feel the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion’ [9]. In February 3, 1994 in her speech at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC she stated: ‘*Please don’t kill the child. I want the child. Please give me the child. I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child*’ [10]. In the same prayer she also said: ‘*If we remember that God loves us, and that we can love others as He loves us, then America can become a sign of peace for the world*’ [10]. She prayed for peace and was speaking loudly about it.

Mother Teresa was not afraid to question authorities. When she thought something was important, she fought for it. When she wanted Father Damian de Veuster to become saint, she fought for it. With her conversation in 1984 during her visit to Rome she met with Cardinal Palazzini to discuss her request. Cardinal reminded Mother Teresa that canonization requires miracles and that Father Veuster does not have any. She then replied: ‘*This would be a good opportunity to change that tradition! After all, the Bible takes precedence over canon law*’ [7].

### Awards and Recognitions

In her life Mother Teresa received several awards. Some of them included Pope John XXIII Peace Prize in 1971, Order of Australia in 1982, Order of Merit from the US

and the UK in 1983, Golden Honour of The Nation in 1994 in Albania [7]. She also was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her achievements in 1979. She was called a humanitarian, advocate for poor and helpless and strong leader. Joseph I. Williams, wrote an article about the leadership of Mother Teresa 2003, described her leadership as being between transformational and transactional. Author stated: *'Mother Teresa was an exceptional leader who exhibited charisma and had the ability to inspire the members of her order to transcend their own self-interests to achieve the vision'* [8]. Mother Teresa was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 10 October 2003. Mother Teresa's beatification was the beginning process of declaring her a saint [9].

## Controversy

The Missionaries of Charity and Mother Houses for dying were described as not sanitary and that those caring for dying were poorly trained in providing medical care. In the study conducted by Serge Larivée, published in March 2013, researchers questioned Mother Teresa's intention and true altruism. They claimed that her persona was created by the Catholic Church, *'What could be better than beatification followed by canonization of this model to revitalize the Church and inspire the faithful especially at a time when churches are empty and the Roman authority is in decline?'* [11]. Mother Teresa's strong stand against abortion, contraception and divorce was also criticized [7, 9, 11].

Critiques also claimed that Mother Teresa's convent was helping others just so they could convert to catholic. In the author's opinion, Mother Teresa was just like a healer, healing others, not curing. She was working with dying and abandoned people and offered them something more than just medical attention. She gave them love, dignity and some attention when all the others left.

## Woman Healer

In his article Kenny [3] discussed important attributes that healers should possess. That is what Mother Teresa exemplifies. Even when she was on her way to see the Pope, there she saw a dying person. She stooped and knelt next to the dying person and started praying with him. Others got nervous since it was getting late and the Pope was waiting. When she was asked to hurry, she stated *'You go and take my place. I am with Jesus. Tell the Pope that I am sorry, but I'm here with Christ'* [5]. Mother Teresa gave others her touch, she listened to them and she provided empathy and prayer, not materialistic curing. She worked *'for the glory of God and in the name of the poor'* and her mission was *'to quench His thirst for love and for souls'* [5, 6]. She is the historic nursing exemplar of a public health nurse.

## Conclusion

Mother Teresa died from heart failure on 5 September 1997 leaving many of her followers behind. Mother Teresa was definitely a public nurse and a woman healer. For 45 years she ministered for the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying. During that time she was also developing the Missionaries of Charity and led to its growth, first throughout India and then around the world. She was healing the sick, poor and unwanted and gave them unconditional love. She acted within a given environment and provided for sick with her 'greater force' and nursing qualities that allowed them to achieve healing. Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu gave to those that were in need more than any cure could do. Surely Mother Teresa was the greatest woman healer and public health nurse of all times.

*'I try to give to the poor people for love what the rich could get for money. No, I wouldn't touch a leper for a thousand pounds; yet I willingly cure him for the love of God'* (Mother Teresa of Calcutta, n.d.).

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