

# LOUISE ELISABETH ELLERMANN

## *The First Overseas Health Care Worker*

BORN: **AUGUST 3, 1884** *Evansville, Ind.*

DIED: **JANUARY 11, 1957** *Clarinda, Iowa*

**L**OUISE ELLERMANN WAS FIRST MISSIONARY NURSE in the history of the Missouri Synod. Her works of mercy in South India opened the door to the Gospel through her visits to the sick and dying. Her medical dispensary in India opened up a new avenue for missions. Thousands of sick and dying — especially women and children — were, for the first time, exposed to the Christian Gospel through her acts of mercy.

Her ministry was made possible by the generous financial support of many Ladies' Aid societies in the Missouri Synod who contributed the \$600 annual salary needed to send a nurse to India.

Ellermann was commissioned on July 1, 1913, having been previously trained as a nurse in Indiana. She arrived in India on November 4, 1913, and quickly began learning the Tamil language. By May 1914, she was making house calls and setting up a simple dispensary in Bargur.

Ellermann was able to reach a demographic group not previously accessible. Because of the role of women in Indian society, male missionaries were not allowed to speak to any women directly, much less proclaim the Gospel to them. Ellermann was allowed to serve this previously unreachable group as she provided critical medical care to women, as well as children and men, by setting up a medical dispensary in 1914 in a location outside traveling distance to a residential hospital. (The nearest medical doctor was 50 miles away.)

All kinds of people came to the dispensary with all kinds of illnesses;

Ellermann did her best to care for them as competently as one nurse could with the very limited supplies and medical knowledge she possessed during her eight years of service in India.

For example, when the patients came to the dispensary, they were presented with the Gospel — through printed Gospel “chits” — while waiting to see the nurse. Ellermann tended to the needs of all who were brought before her for help, regardless of caste or religious affiliation.

This show of the mercy of Christ to all was the first overtly social ministry of the Missouri Synod in South India. It showed how social ministries could be properly tied to the proclamation of Christ. This led to health care becoming a central part of the Missouri Synod missions in South India and around the world. Louise Ellermann will always be remembered for her courage and bravery as she broke new ground as she paired evangelism with medical care in spite of the very limited medical resources at her disposal.

**For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit [lcms.org/175](https://lcms.org/175).**

### DISCOVER MORE

*“Louise Ellerman,” in The Mercy of Christ Freely Given: The First Twenty-Seven Years of Missouri Synod Mission Work in India: A Museum Exhibit Catalog (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 2019), 37–41.*



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**ONLY JESUS**  
NO OTHER NAME

– 175 YEARS –



THE  
**LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
MISSOURI SYNOD



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