

# YOU bring health and joy to Uganda



## Healing and Hope

### MISSION DOCTORS ASSOCIATION

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August 2017

Miria arrived at St. Francis, a rural mission hospital in Uganda, East Africa, 37 weeks pregnant with severe abdominal pain.

Mission Doctor Ann Marie Raffo, an OB-GYN from Orange County, California, knew this to be a sign of something serious. She asked the attending nurse to check Miria's blood pressure. It was frighteningly high, putting both Miria and her baby's life at serious risk.

You made it possible for Mission Doctors like Anne Marie Raffo and Patricia Becker to be there. Dr. Raffo performed the lifesaving c-section and Dr. Becker, a pediatrician, cared for her daughter after delivery.

We recently heard from Pontius Mayunga, the hospital administrator at St. Francis, and we wanted to share his thanks with you: **“We at St. Francis Hospital Mutolere Uganda are grateful to Mission Doctors for the partnership we share. The doctors who come from MDA provide outstanding care to all our patients. They are faithful Catholics and we see that they love God and all his children. We hope to continue our relationship with them for many years.”**

**Miria and her family are grateful too. You help us continue this lifesaving partnership with St. Francis hospital and all of the locations Mission Doctors serve. Thank you.**

# Faith and Medicine in Uganda

*Mission Doctor Lou Coda shared this poignant reflection on his family's most recent Mission at rural Saint Francis Hospital in Mutolere, Uganda. Reflecting on the lives of his patients and his faith, Lou illustrates the challenges of serving with gratitude and hope.*

That 36 hours was a trying ride.

Since it began, three children had already died and one more was to follow. It was not an epidemic, not a motor vehicle accident or catastrophe. It was small individual waves that came together for a brief period of time forming a large swell, one child with overwhelming sepsis, another with premature birth, a third with advanced congenital heart disease. One of the surgical ward nurses had asked me to see a child with worsening abdominal pain that the surgeons thought may have been a liver abscess. They wanted me to do an ultrasound to see if anything needed to be drained.

The female surgical ward had 14 beds lined up against the walls, each about 2 feet apart and 2 other overflow beds in the center aisle. Lying on the beds were women of all ages, from young girls to old women, suffering with burns, fractures, trauma, tumors, infections, and illnesses not yet sorted out. Each bed had a number of attendants around it.

The patient I was asked to see was in the bed second from the swinging double doors that led in and out of the ward. She was about 10 years old, lying upon a number of pillows, her mother and relatives at her side. The child was in distress with pain and difficulty breathing. Her face was anxious, but also slightly distorted. The family reported that she had been eating poorly and not going to the bathroom for days. In the last few days, she developed right upper abdominal pain and difficulty breathing. As the pieces of the puzzle came into focus, I determined that she was

experiencing liver tenderness due to liver congestion from heart failure, a large amount of fluid between the lung and chest wall, arm and neck contractures and severe curvature of the spine. The cause of her suffering was most likely due to a congenital/chromosomal abnormality, resulting in the spine and chest deformity causing progressively increasing breathing difficulties. This lowered her oxygen levels and now put her into heart failure with all of its problems, including liver swelling and pain.

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“As my eyes wandered around the room, an old, stained and faded close up picture of Christ dying on the cross caught my gaze.”

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I sat at a table in the duty room, gathering my thoughts to write a note and come up with a plan. The sadness of the 3 children who had died earlier in the day and the realization that there was nothing that could be done to fix this girl in the surgical ward lay heavy upon me. **As my eyes wandered around the room, an old, stained and faded close up picture of Christ dying on the cross caught my gaze. The similarity of Christ's death, a death from an inability to breath due to the constricting hanging of his body on the cross. The fluid building up in His chest and the resulting heart failure was like this young girl's.** Even their mothers stood by helplessly, unable to give relief, only able to share in their child's suffering, letting them know they were not alone. How the brokenness and suffering of our world continues ever on. The pain and suffering could not be contained or controlled, but somehow it has a profound meaning and power to change us if held onto rather than run away from.



Mission Doctor Lou Coda writing in a patient's medical book



Children playing outside St. Francis Hospital in rural Uganda, East Africa

Now mix together with this child's illness the curing of severely malnourished, markedly dehydrated, parasite obstructed, malaria infected children. Add the successes and failures of developing a higher level of care newborn nursery. Witness the unforeseen overwhelming generosity of so many people responding to the hospital and patients needs for a functioning X-ray machine. Receive donation after donation to support orphans, grant scholarships to gifted nursing students, and provide medicine and medical equipment to unknown people. **Share the gratitude of so many of the patients for the care they have received. Be supported by hospital staff and community members who live and breathe service, compassion, humility and love on a daily basis.** The greatness of this symphony directed by our great Conductor can only be allowed to resonate within us, slowly bringing us into its harmonies.

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“So I also am grateful for not understanding and for a willingness to wait, to hope and know that this is God’s world and I am a part of it.”

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As the German poet Ranier Maria Rilke writes to a young poet a little over a century ago, “Do not measure in terms of time: one year or ten years means nothing. For the artist there is no counting or tallying up: just ripening like the tree that does not force its sap and endures the storms of spring without fearing that summer will not come. But it will come. It comes, however, only to the patient ones who stand there as if all eternity lay before them—vast, still, untroubled. I learn this every day of my life, I learn it from hardships I am grateful for: patience is all.”

So I also am grateful for not understanding and for a willingness to wait, to hope and know that this is God’s world and I am a part of it.



# Healing and Music

Mission Doctor Patricia Becker served and cared for children in rural Uganda. Dr. Becker's daughter Kate joined her to offer her own gifts.

Kate filled the hospital wards with melodic violin music, bringing joy and a moment of peace to an otherwise bustling hospital. Patricia and Kate brought healing for both the body and spirit to St. Francis Hospital.



## Upcoming Events

**September 15-17, 2017: Fall Retreat/Seminar**  
Doctors and their spouses considering short-term service are invited to attend a Retreat/Seminar at Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago. Take the time to reflect on God's call to 'heal the sick' and discuss the practical issues of medical licenses, visas, and international health insurance. Visit the MDA website for more information.

**October 8, 2017: White Mass**  
In recognition of the dedicated work of Catholic Health Care Professionals, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and Mission Doctors Association invite all Catholic medical professionals to the celebration of a White Mass at Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. Visit [www.CatholicWM.org](http://www.CatholicWM.org) for more details.

**Mark your calendars!**

*'Heart for the World Gala'* - February 24, 2018



## MISSION DOCTORS ASSOCIATION

Following Christ's call to heal the sick,  
Mission Doctors Association  
provides lifesaving medical care for the poor  
and training for local healthcare professionals  
around the world.

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