

A sunset over Samanvaya is one example of God's beauty and wonder at the eco-health center in Pune, India. (Rowena Miranda)



by Sr. Rowena Miranda

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The Medical Mission Sisters have been pioneers in the healing ministry. In 1925 when the congregation was founded in the United States, the focus of our mission was direct medical care through hospitals and dispensaries, as that was the urgent need of those days.

But a booklet of our founder's talks says that as hospitals began providing direct medical care since we began our hospital ministry in Pakistan in 1926, our understanding of our charism of healing has been evolving to respond to the needs of the time.

Mother Anna Dengel, a physician and our founder, often told her sisters: "We must adapt ourselves to the needs; the needs will not adapt themselves to us.  We must never be afraid to change if it is needed."  And it is in this spirit that the healing mission of the Medical Mission Sisters has evolved over the years.

Our experience dealing with disease and illness brought us to understand that it is not just the physical body that needs to be treated or healed, but the whole person and from curative to promotive to preventive health care, we have expanded our healing ministry to include justice as integral to healing and health, and in the 1980s pioneered the move to holistic healing with alternate health therapies.

We soon realized that care and healing of the planet was very much linked to the healing and health of humans. Since 1985 we have been striving to include care of the earth and healing of the planet as vital in the healing and health of humans.




Medical Mission Sr. Rowena Miranda, center, stands with sisters in front of the convent at the eco-health center Samanvaya. (Courtesy of Rowena Miranda)

We believe that we cannot have healthy persons or healthy communities on a sick planet.

These past 62 years, Medical Mission Sisters, through toil and hard work, have made a once-barren hill in Pune, India, into a green "lung." With a variety of about 3,000 trees, we have tried to maintain the flora and fauna where all those who come in enjoy the freshness and pure air, listen to the songs of the birds, have an awesome view of sunsets, and live in solidarity with the community of life — reptiles, rodents, peacocks, squirrels and a wide variety of birds.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis calls for an "ecological conversion" in human hearts, to care for the earth as our common home in responsible stewardship of God's gift of creation. Responding to this call and the crying need of the hour, our community has opened a new center for eco-healing and health on our hilltop space in Bibwewadi, overlooking the city of Pune.




(Rowena Miranda)

The environment with its greenery — away from the hustle and bustle of the city — provides a conducive ambience for quiet, meditation, retreats, to commune with nature and experience healing of body-mind and spirit.

The center is named Samanvaya, meaning harmony, integration, coordination. The logo depicts humans and nature coexisting in harmony.

With this center, our community hopes to bring awareness and promote a more harmonious living with all of creation in the spirit of coexistence, which will surely have a positive effect on the person, enabling them to experience healing, health and wholeness.

The center has individual units spread out in the campus. The units are: a residence with an administrative block for the Medical Mission Sisters staff, a chapel with meditation hall, a conference hall, a dining room, a dormitory with two wings for 20 people, five hermitages that can accommodate 10 people and two quarters for co-workers.

Along the way there are rocks to sit on, stones with inspirational wording, and statues. Each statue has a story to tell: Mother Dengel, St. Francis of Assisi, Sleeping St. Joseph, the Holy Family and at the end, Jesus with open arms welcoming all to rest. A labyrinth invites the visitor for a meditative walk, and a lotus pond is present to refresh the mind.

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Our vision is to create a space to support humans living in harmony with each other and with all of creation in a healing way.

Our mission is to promote care of the earth, and healing and health for all persons, and to provide space and an environment in which persons can touch the divine in themselves and all of creation through quiet reflection, commune with nature, and learning sessions.

Our philosophy is respect for every person, regardless of creed, caste, gender, status, and social, cultural, or economic background; and care and reverence for all of creation.

Medical Mission Sisters want to spread the good news of how you can take care of yourself and the earth — our mother and home — in a holistic way. We have installed renewable energy systems — solar water heating and solar lighting, recycling of wastewater, rainwater harvesting, bio-enzyme composting, garbage segregation and recycling. We hope to make this place into a plastic- and pollution-free zone.

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Samanvaya can offer space to individuals or groups seeking some quiet time, a place to retreat or just commune with nature. It will offer awareness programs on eco-healing and health, provide a place to learn from nature, promote renewable energy and — for those desiring healing — offer nature cures and herbal remedies. The facilities will also be available to groups who want to conduct their own programs.

The eco-center will work in collaboration with our existing holistic health center, which offers acupuncture, naturopathy treatment and basic holistic health education programs. It is also involved in HIV/AIDS ministry.

Three Medical Mission Sisters moved to the center in August 2021 to form a new community and begin planning, supervision and setting up the eco-healing and

health ministry. In the midst of the pandemic and its restrictions, we are blessed with being naturally socially distanced, enjoy breathing pure fresh air and being caressed by gentle cool breezes. We wake up to the beauty of sunrise and close the day with glorifying God for the awesome sunset. We are also enjoying the gifts of nature — fruits and vegetables. Our three co-workers are a blessing, as they help us in caring all those who come to the center.

Visitors to the center — including municipal and government officials — are amazed to see such a space in the heart of Pune city. Groups that have availed themselves of our facilities have found it ideal for quiet, reflection, retreats and healing amid the wonder and beauty of God's creation.

We are grateful to Mother Anna Denge, who with great vision purchased this hilltop property back in 1953.



The center's campus includes five hermitages that can accommodate 10 people. It also includes a chapel with meditation hall, a conference hall, a dining room and a dormitory. (Rowena Miranda)