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Mother Teresa: Mother to Many



Written by Jennifer Dobner

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Mother Teresa

The Extraordinary Mother Teresa

“Do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”

These are the words of Mother Teresa. She was a famous Roman Catholic **nun** who worked with poor and dying people.

Mother Teresa was born an ordinary girl. Yet through her deep faith and love for others, she became an extraordinary woman who touched many lives.



What does a nun do?

Nuns are women who take vows committing their lives to their religion.

For some, that means living a life of service to others. Some are teachers. Some are nurses who care for sick people. Others spend their lives in a form of prayer called *meditation*.

Catholic nuns usually live in special homes called *convents*. They do not marry or have families of their own. To show their commitment to God, many take special religious names.



- 1 Two Catholic nuns laugh together in Senegal.
- 2 A Jain nun prays at the foot of a statue in India.

- 3 Young Buddhist nuns in Myanmar sit and study at their monastery.
- 4 A Catholic nun nurses an injured girl.





Skopje has been part of many different empires and countries through the centuries. Today it is the capital of and largest city in Macedonia.

From Agnes to Teresa

Mother Teresa was born in Skopje (SKOHP-yuh) on August 26, 1910. She was named Agnes and was the third of three children.

Agnes had a happy life. Her family belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, and religion was an important part of their lives. Young Agnes loved church, went to a church school, and sang at church. She was also interested in **missionaries** who worked with poor or needy people on behalf of the church.



Agnes (right) with her older sister and brother



Agnes as a teenager



These are the only available photos of Nikola and Dranafil Bojaxhiu, Agnes's parents. A century ago, photos were much rarer than they are today.

When Agnes was eight, her father died. Without him, her family was poor. Her mother opened a cloth and sewing shop to support them.

No matter how little the family had, Agnes's mother always helped others. She cared for sick people and fed those who were hungry, even strangers. Her kindness was an **inspiration** to Agnes who wanted to help people, too.

By the time she was twelve years old, Agnes believed God wanted her to become a nun.

With her mother's blessing, Agnes left her family at age eighteen and went to Ireland. There she became a nun and chose the name Sister Teresa.



Agnes (left) in Ireland as a young nun

A Day of Inspiration

The nuns had schools in India. They sent Sister Teresa to Calcutta, one of India's largest and poorest cities. She taught there and later became the school's principal.



Sister Teresa during her teaching time in Calcutta, around 1940



Millions of children live in slums in India.

Teresa believed that she received a message from God one day in 1946. She believed that God wanted her to go work in the **slums** with poor and sick people. Sister Teresa would later call it her “day of inspiration.”

“The message was very clear,” Sister Teresa said. “It was a command. I knew where I had to go.”



Sister Teresa talks to a young child in the 1950s.

Wearing a simple white and blue dress, Sister Teresa left the school. She began teaching children under a tree, scratching the letters of the alphabet into the dirt with a stick. She also began caring for sick people.

In 1950, other nuns came to work with Sister Teresa. That's when she formed the **Missionaries of Charity** and became known as Mother Teresa.

In Calcutta, many people were too poor to go to doctors. Mother Teresa worried that so many people died alone on the streets. So in 1952, she opened a special home for poor and dying people.

She also opened a home for children whose parents had died or who were too poor to care for them.



Mother Teresa plays with a child at the Missionaries of Charity hospital.

High Honors for Hard Work

In 1979, Mother Teresa was given the Nobel Peace Prize. The award is given yearly to people who work to promote peace or better the lives of others. It is a very high honor. Mother Teresa received the award because she had eased great suffering for so many.

At a ceremony, Mother Teresa accepted the honor "on behalf of the poor." She used the award's prize money to feed poor people and pay for their medical care.

The post office in India issued a special stamp honoring Mother Teresa after she was awarded the Nobel Prize. It was a way of honoring her and thanking her for her work on behalf of the Indian people.



Many other countries have also honored Mother Teresa with stamps. The United States issued this stamp in 2010.



A nun with the Missionaries of Charity feeds soup to poor people in Russia, 2003.

Her Good Work Goes On

Mother Teresa died in 1997 at the age of 87, but the work of the Missionaries of Charity goes on. As of 2016, more than 5,800 men and women help sick and poor people in 139 countries.

Her story goes on as well. On September 4, 2016, before huge crowds in Rome, Pope Francis declared her a saint.

Glossary

charity (<i>n.</i>)	a sense of love and generosity toward people in need (p. 12)
inspiration (<i>n.</i>)	a good influence; something that leads to creativity (p. 8)
missionaries (<i>n.</i>)	people who travel to another place to spread a religion (p. 7)
nun (<i>n.</i>)	a female member of a religious community who vows to remain poor and unmarried, and devotes her life to active service or prayer (p. 4)
saint (<i>n.</i>)	a person who has been formally recognized for having lived a holy or virtuous life (p. 15)
slums (<i>n.</i>)	poor, crowded areas of a city (p. 11)

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