

# UCC ROOTS

## *Remembering our History*

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### **“Elise Kettler Longed to Tell the Story of Christ’s Love”**

Zenana missions were an important part of missionary work in India in the 19th and early 20th centuries. “Zenana” refers to the private areas in high caste Indian homes reserved for women. Male missionaries were unable to serve women in those settings. As a consequence, female missionaries were needed in many denominations to minister to Indian women.

Elise Kettler (1873-1957) was a missionary commissioned by the German Evangelical Synod to serve in India. She was born in Washington, DC, the daughter of German immigrants. Her father was a bodyguard to President Lincoln at his inauguration, and a guard at Lincoln’s funeral.

Initially Kettler made maps for the U. S. Forestry Service. One day, however, while drawing a map in 1907, she felt called to missionary service. In 1909 she graduated from the Union Missionary Training Institute in Brooklyn, NY. She explained that

*“A great longing awoke in my heart at that time, a longing to help...my sisters in India and to tell them the story of Christ’s love...I could not have peace of mind and heart, until I made a complete surrender, offering my life for the mission field if it was the Lord’s will to use me there.”*

It was the “Lord’s will.” Kettler served for 22 years in “zenana” settings. She trained Indian Christian women to teach the Bible in Raipur. Later she served as principal of a Bible Training School for Women in Baitalpur. In 1916, she reported that she and the teachers she trained, gave 1900 messages to over 10,000 people.

In retirement Kettler returned to her home in Washington, DC and, until her death at age 83 she continued to teach the Bible and lecture on missions in India.

*Contributor: James Semmelroth Darnell*

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