



Anna Nitschmann 1715-1760

Anna Caritas Nitschmann was a Moravian Brethren missionary, lyrical poet, and the second wife of Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf. She served as the Chief Eldress of the Renewed Moravian Church for most of her life, beginning at the young age of 14.

The Moravians are one of the most interesting groups in the history of Christianity. Spiritual heirs of the Bohemian martyr John Hus, they suffered religious persecution for generations until a remnant found refuge on the estate of Zinzendorf in 1722. Here, in the town they called Hernhut, (in what is now known as East Germany) a growing thriving community of Moravians developed. While still in Moravia, Anna Nitschmann's father and older brother had been jailed for their Christian faith. They managed to escape to Hernhut, where they became actively involved in the Moravian community. That was 1725.

At the age of 12, Anna was deeply affected by the spiritual awakening in the Moravian community. She had been going through a bit of rebellion. She seemed to lose interest in religious things. She saw widespread dissensions, turmoil, grudges held by Moravian people. When someone in the community would press for her conversion, she would snap, "First get converted yourself, and then talk to me." It was the awakening of August 13, 1727, that turned her around.

By 1727, the severe turmoil among the community caught the attention of the elders. The concerned leaders earnestly prayed and, after a communion service on August 13, 1727, an unusual spiritual awakening swept across the people there. The whole community sensed that they needed to turn from their pettiness and pursue God's calling. That was the beginning of an around the clock 24-hour-a-day prayer meeting, which would go on for over 100 years. Anna's life was changed. She dedicated her life to the Lord's service, and immediately began organizing the young women of the community into a kind of club for worship and ministry. It was this activity that caught the eye of community leaders and caused them to nominate her for the chief eldress position. Anna accepted the appointment as from the Lord. Just as the surprising choice of the shepherd boy David proved decisive for Israel, so the choice of young Anna would be for the Moravians.

Six weeks after her election, Anna led 18 of the "single sisters" to devote themselves thoroughly to Christ. This commitment was a major one, signaling a

serious desire to serve the Lord. This "single sisters" group would grow over the following decades, providing a stream of courageous missionaries.

Later, Anna became part of the "Pilgrim congregation," a group of spiritual storm troopers ready to go anywhere to spread the name of Christ. Her mission travels took her to numerous countries, even to America, where she helped in the founding of Bethlehem and Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and ministered effectively among various Indian groups.

In an era when women were not looked to as hymn writers, Anna wrote more than 30 hymns that were published in the Moravians' German hymnal.

Anna twice refused offers for marriage. But one year after Count Zinzendorf's wife died, he asked Anna to marry him and she agreed. She was a commoner and he a noble, but within the Hernhut community, all were equals, and Anna, now 41, had proven her Christian commitment time and time again. It was said of Anna: "When she spoke or prayed or sang, all hearts stood open to her."

By the time of Anna Nitschmann's death in 1760, the Moravians had sent out 226 missionaries and baptized more than 3000 converts. That was only 38 years since the founding of the Hernhut community and only 28 years since they sent their first missionaries.