

Another Sign of God's Presence

Sister Cordelia Nwaokike is a nurse and works in MMM Primary Health Care (PHC) in Benin City, Nigeria. She wrote, 'PHC work includes mobile outreach and school health programmes. Our visits to homes and schools encouraged me to get involved in rehabilitation work. We saw children with very challenging conditions that prevented them from mixing with others. We asked how we could help.'



Primary health care staff

'After discussing the options with the family, we accompany them to the hospital for a review by a doctor and for confirmation of what needs to be done. Most of these children come from poor families, so while we seek support from immediate and extended families, we also approach the village heads, local citizens and the government, e.g. Commissioner for Women Affairs. Sometimes private hospitals, such as Prime Opticals, are willing to help. MMM has supported the work from mission funds.'

'We work with the Daughters of Charity at St. Vincent de Paul Hospital, also in Edo State. They run clinics and organize orthopedic surgery at subsidized costs and sometimes for free in cases of extreme poverty. They involve the family in care to get them to invest in the outcome, which achieves better success. Children with more complicated issues are referred for more specialized care.'

'I would like to tell you about one little girl, Glory, who was four years old when we met her. We were coming back from mobile outreach and saw a child crawling by the side of the road. When we asked her where she lived, she pointed to a nearby house. There we met Glory's mother, who told us that three days after Glory was born her left leg became infected and she eventually lost all her toes. A traditional doctor cut off the stump. Glory was not able to start school because she was not able to walk. She would say, "Look at my sisters; they are going to school. This my little leg won't allow me."

'We followed up Glory's case and helped her to get a prosthesis, which enabled her to walk on her own. She started school last year and was walking like the other children. Recently it was observed that she was bending towards the affected leg and had some pain in the new stump. Review at the hospital showed a contracture between the stump and the lower thigh that needs to be released. Glory has been booked for further surgery. In the meantime she is a very happy 6-year-old!'

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'I will see you again' (Jn16:22).



Sister Edel Weir, MMM Born in Mullingar in 1932, Sister Edel trained as a Montessori teacher before joining MMM in 1951. Later she trained as a nurse and clinical instructress. In 1961 she was assigned to Malawi and served there for 15 years. She returned to Ireland in 1977 and was assistant matron in the IMTH for 10 years. She did relief work in Kilmacow and served in MMM leadership in the Motherhouse. In 1996 she returned to Malawi and worked for 4 years in women's development programmes.

Sister Edel returned to Ireland in 2001 and assisted in the Motherhouse. In November 2016 she was admitted to St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin for treatment and died there peacefully on 18 November.



Sister Bernadette Gilsenan, MMM Sister Bernadette was born in Dublin in 1933 and joined MMM in 1952. She first helped with catering in Ireland and was assigned to Kenya in 1962. After 12 years in development work, she did mission awareness in the USA for 5 years and then trained in social work. She served in fundraising, mission awareness work and MMM leadership in Ireland. She returned to Kenya for 6 more years to do pastoral work and teach home craft to women. In 1994 Bernadette began 15 years on mission awareness in the USA.

Sister Bernadette returned to Ireland in 2009 and after a year in Dublin, moved to the Motherhouse. She moved to Aras Mhuire in February 2013 for ongoing nursing care. She died there peacefully on 8 August 2016.



Sister Anne O'Mahony, MMM Sister Anne was born in Kerry in 1924 and joined MMM in 1943. She trained as a radiographer and as a midwife. She was assigned to Nigeria in 1952 and served for 16 years, mainly as a midwifery tutor. She was radiographer in Drogheda for 4 years and taught for 7 years in Tanzania and 2 years in Kenya. Sister Anne returned to Ireland in 1983 and spent 8 years as a midwifery tutor in Dublin. She later trained in reflexology and for 13 years made home visits to the sick and elderly.

In 2006, she moved to the Motherhouse and continued home visiting. Sister Anne transferred to Aras Mhuire in November 2011 for nursing care. She died peacefully on 8 November 2016.



At Christmas we pray for all of our friends and supporters. We thank you for sharing with us in Christ's healing mission today, 'that all may have life in its fullness' (Jn 10:10). May God bless you and those you love with healing and peace. 'Since God has loved us so much, we also ought to love one another' (1 Jn 4:11 NRSV).



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MEDICAL MISSIONARIES of MARY

SUPPLEMENT TO HEALING & DEVELOPMENT — VOLUME 77 — CHRISTMAS 2016



'The Heart of the Good Shepherd tells us that God's love is limitless... There we find the source of that faithful and meek love which sets free and makes others free' (Pope Francis).

The God of Inclusion

In the upside down world of the Gospel, those who are important are not the ones at the centres of power, but those on the margins. Jesus often called forth people who lacked power and restored them to the community. They included people prevented from living a full, normal life because of a physical or mental limitation.

Sister Phyllis Heaney has devoted her life to working with people with disabilities in São Paulo, Brazil. Around 1991, she moved to a parish in Jardim Angela and began a ministry with people with intellectual disabilities. A meeting with Jean Vanier inspired her to form a Faith and Light community, in which families were encouraged to have a vision of 'living life to the full' (Jn 10:10). They were helped to reflect on the beauty of being blessed with a special child.

Phyllis dreamed of having a house where children with intellectual disabilities could stay while their mothers had one day a week to care for themselves. The target groups would be the most vulnerable, economically poor, and rejected from the area. Eventually, sufficient funds were raised to buy a suitable house: the Nest of Hope is a welcoming centre with a garden. The 'nest' image is from Jean Vanier, describing a safe, supported, and secure place that allows the young to fly when they are ready. The enterprising mothers decided to use the respite to take jobs such as doing laundry to earn an income.

Another dream came true with the establishment of The Forum for Included, which struggles for the rights of these special people, to be their voice to the authorities. It advocates for access to current services and for developing services that are needed.

A special year

Sister Phyllis said that beautiful things happened in 2016. 'In October I was visiting with our health team in a place where people who have no housing and can't afford rent, live in shacks on local government land. I met a young couple and their baby, and the husband's mother with two more sons. One was twenty-one years old, deaf and dumb, and the other

was twelve years old, autistic and almost blind. Neither Joe nor John had had any treatment and have no allowance benefit. Because of our work in The Forum we now have a centre for treatment and for looking after the rights of our people with autism. Hopefully life will now be better for all. It is a great privilege to be here with them.

'Our Forum for Included has been working to finalize a survey that will give us a breakdown of the number, type and density of people with disabilities in the entire area of Jardim Angela. This year the survey was completed in detail. Participants included all the co-ordination teams of the nineteen health centres, the social workers in the area, members of Nest of Hope, and others with similar interests.

'Now we are planning a seminar to which we will invite our local government authorities. They will be able to hear, see and feel our reality. Our hope is that they will become aware of and respond to the urgent need for public services for all our people. We want them to hear the cry of the marginalized.'

A reason to celebrate!

While much media attention was given to a global sports event in Rio de Janeiro this year, another celebration took place in São Paulo. Phyllis explained, 'In our Forum, every year for about fifteen years we have had The Dance of Happiness, with all the intellectually limited persons in Jardim Angela and other areas. This year the theme was The Olympics, because we hosted them in Brazil. We participated from Nest of Hope with a special dance. Then we had a fancy dress parade all together!

'We had great fun and ALL won an Olympic medal. You should have seen our smiles and joy and those of the mothers, just beaming. Then we had a big party with presents. The place was full of joy and happiness and our families went home feeling valued, precious and special, including me and all our Forum members and friends and volunteers. Praise and thanks to God!'



Witnessing to the joy of the Dance of Happiness



Sr. Phyllis (right front) and other members of the Forum for Included



Everyone has a voice in the Forum.

'To let the oppressed go free' (Is. 58:6)

International Day for the Abolition of Slavery on 2 December called our attention to the fact that slavery persists in our time in the form of trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, forced marriage, and the worst forms of child labour. It often involves discrimination against the most vulnerable groups in society.



Visit of UN representatives on World Day against Trafficking in Persons

Sister Justina Odunukwe, based at our MMM community in Abuja, Nigeria, spent 27 years as a hospital administrator in Nigeria and Tanzania. While attending a renewal program in Berkeley, California in 2014 she became aware of the global reality of trafficking in persons.

She explained, 'As part of my program in Berkeley, I helped at soup kitchens for homeless people. I visited rehabilitation centers for people with drug addiction and for young women, mainly from Mexico, who were trafficked and forced into prostitution. In Berkeley I learned that 60 to 80 percent of all immigrants working in the commercial sex industry in Italy are Nigerians.



Food distribution at a camp for internally displaced people

'When I returned to Nigeria, I asked to work in the area of human trafficking. Our Congregational Plan encourages the provision of opportunities for ministering in such situations. Our MMM West Africa Area Team advised me to work with existing NGOs or the government. In June 2016, I was accepted by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) as a volunteer.

'NAPTIP headquarters in Abuja has eight departments and one closed shelter for victims. There are also eight zonal offices in different parts of the country with eight open shelters. I work at a closed shelter under the Counselling and Rehabilitation Department, where victims of trafficking are offered accommodation, food, counselling, skills training and eventually and reunion with their families. Those in closed shelters are not allowed to leave until their legal cases are over. Often their traffickers are awaiting trial in NAPTIP detention cells. The legal department prosecutes, tries and sentences traffickers.

'At the shelter, professional counsellors, social workers, nurses, cleaners, a matron, cooks and security staff work to create an atmosphere where residents feel accepted, loved and cared for. My work includes one to one spiritual direction of victims, listening to their stories and helping to deepen their experience of God. I work with the staff to create a supportive environment. At any given time, there are 20 to 35 victims at the shelter. Ninety-nine percent are minors under 18 years of age. Ninety-five percent are young women rescued from forced prostitution from within and outside the country. The remainder are boys who are victims of exploitative child labour.'



Staff at NAPTIP receive gifts bought with funds provided by Lorraine Cousins and her group in the USA

NAPTIP coordinates services and partners with other stakeholders both nationally and internationally to fight the scourge of human trafficking. According to its records, 9,895 people were rescued and 291 traffickers were convicted from 2003 to 2014.

What else can we do?

We can support the fight against human trafficking:

- Become an advocate: Lend your voice to the international community of supporters who are refusing to look away. Utilize your online social platforms to spread awareness and connect others to this need.
- Stand for justice in our communities, our places of work and in our families.
- Give a gift to programmes that work to prevent trafficking and help rescue and restore young women and men to dignity and freedom.
- Pray that human trafficking will be crushed, that justice will be done and lives will be freed from the nightmare of this modern day slavery.



Providing support for young people affected by trafficking