As with so many other communities and families in the USA, our MMMs and Associates are feeling the effects of COVID-19. These include restrictions on visiting loved ones in hospitals and nursing facilities. Sister Mary Katherine Donato was living in Mary Immaculate Nursing/Restorative Center in Lawrence, MA, when her condition began to deteriorate recently. The Sisters and her family faced the distress of not being able to be with her in her last days. The following is a tribute to Mary, who lived a long life of love and dedication to God and to others.

Sister Mary Katherine (Dominic Savio) Donato was born in Coatesville, PA, USA in 1931. She completed her early education there and trained as a nurse. She worked as a staff nurse in Boston, in Pennsylvania, and in Cape Cod Hospital - which she especially enjoyed - before joining MMM in Winchester, MA, USA in 1954. After profession she completed midwifery training in Drogheda. Soon after, in 1958, she was assigned to Nigeria, where she served for four years in Urua Akpan as a nurse-midwife and in the pharmacy and outpatients’ department.

Sister Mary went to London in 1963 to complete studies as a midwifery tutor. She returned to Nigeria, where she was midwifery tutor for three years. In 1968 she returned to the USA and was infirmarian at Pope John XXIII Seminary for a year. Mary was able to return to Nigeria at the end of 1970. This time she was midwifery tutor in Anua for four years.

Back in the USA in 1975, she was vocation director and on our formation team for five and a half years. In 1981, she did a nursing refresher course and worked as a staff nurse in Boston for two years, followed by updating in midwifery in Philadelphia. Mary was assigned to Tanzania in 1984. She was midwifery tutor in Makiungu and also served in local MMM leadership.

From 1987 to 1992, Mary was based in Boston, MA, and worked as a nurse-midwife in a teen pregnancy programme and at three city community health centres. During that time she obtained her certification as a chaplain and a master’s degree in clinical pastoral education and worked part-time as a midwife in St. Margaret’s Hospital in Dorchester. Mary moved to City Island, New York, in 1992 and was part-time vocation director and contact person for MMM. She was also a visiting nurse for Dominican Sisters’ Family Health Services and for four months accompanied a candidate to MMM.

In early 1996, Mary began yet another ministry in Tijuana, Mexico, near the USA border, as a volunteer in two community health programmes and helping to establish our MMM house there. After two years she returned to the Boston area. Based at our house in Somerville, for about seven years she was a part-time chaplain at St. Joseph’s Nursing Care Center in Dorchester and was MMM vocation contact person for the eastern USA.
Still active in 2005, Mary was a Eucharistic minister in her local parish and helped with house duties. She supervised cooking and did food shopping. By 2015 she needed some care and in 2017 Mary moved to Sancta Maria Nursing Facility in Cambridge, MA. Finally, in 2018 she moved to Mary Immaculate Nursing/Restorative Center, where she was lovingly cared for by the staff. In the last few weeks her health began to decline but sadly, those dear to her were not able to visit.

On Wednesday, 15 April 2020, the wonderful staff of Mary Immaculate played music in Mary’s room. They made sure that Margie, our dedicated care manager, and some sisters from the Boston community could say good-bye to Mary by phone before she died and tell her how much she was loved. Since then, thanks to current technology, many MMMs and Associates have been sharing their memories, bringing all of us together.

There will be a memorial Mass and celebration of Mary’s life when it is possible for MMMs, family and friends to gather. We will miss Mary’s wonderful smile and joy in life. She loved fishing and cooking and was very proud of her roots in the beautiful Brandywine Creek area in Pennsylvania.