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MEDICAL
MISSIONARIES
of MARY

SUPPLEMENT TO HEALING & DEVELOPMENT — VOLUME 82 — EASTER 2021



*'God will lead them to springs of
living water' (Rev 7:17 NIV).*

The Power of Water - and Women

While water is necessary to sustain life, events in Central America reminded us of the power of water to cause great devastation. Honduras was hit by two hurricanes last November. An article by the BBC on 29 November 2020 titled *Hurricanes leave Hondurans homeless and destitute*, said:

'Eta arrived in Nicaragua on 3 November as a category four hurricane and ripped through Honduras and Guatemala on its path north. Less than two weeks later, Hurricane Iota made landfall just 15 miles (24 km) south of where Eta had hit. The torrential rain brought by the almost back-to-back hurricanes caused deadly landslides, flash flooding and destruction.'

Photojournalist Encarni Pindado travelled to San Pedro Sula, the country's second city and industrial centre to see the damage. Our Sisters in Choloma are based in this area. Mr. Pindado commented, 'Official figures suggest more than 150,000 people have been left homeless due to the damage caused by the two storms. Entire families are camping out wherever they can, even if it means sleeping rough by the side of a motorway. Many are developing health problems ranging from simple colds to skin rashes and gastrointestinal problems. Mosquito-borne dengue and Covid are also on the rise.'



Homes in rural areas are often constructed with poor materials.

Already at risk

Our other MMMs and Associates in Honduras were witnesses to the suffering caused by Hurricanes Eta and Iota. Sister Margaret Nakafu wrote, 'In Siguatepeque the *Comite de Emergencia Municipal* (CODEM) and fire fighters evacuated 300 persons from 120 homes after their *barrios* were flooded. Later CODEM



The rescue efforts

found that 56 of the houses were destroyed; 64 could be repaired. Family members were separated from each other, with children dispersed amongst the community, posing additional risks for them.

'The people live in places vulnerable to natural disasters, including flooding, with substandard housing materials that are not hurricane resistant. Unrelenting rains softened timber and mud-brick houses, making them fall. Houses with strong foundations were flooded partly because they were along rivers or in wetlands. Housing in *barrios* is mainly in 1- or 2-room houses with considerable overcrowding, which poses an additional risk of COVID-19 transmission.'

A shared response

MMM's joined with government, NGOs and other stakeholders such as the Red Cross, in providing emergency supplies of food, clothing, beds, water, face masks, trauma counselling, sanitation, etc. During their visits they realized that two families had badly damaged houses; two days later these houses fell and the Sisters facilitated moving the families to safer places.

The combination of the post-hurricane clean-up, reconstruction and the continuing health emergency due to COVID-19 far exceeds the capacity of the government to address. The development office in the Siguatepeque municipality has limited funding available and is focusing on rebuilding and repairing public infrastructure. So community members in Siguatepeque are being mobilized and MMMs are helping with rebuilding and repair for marginalized families.

Sister Margaret was already involved in ministry in Siguatepeque. She works with parish priest Daniel Ponce and local volunteers in caring for the elderly and infirm. Elderly persons are often the main carers for their grandchildren. The parish team is also concerned with environmental issues, such as deforestation, burning of farmland leading to wildfires, community sanitation, access to clean water, and supporting land rights. These activities are done with the local government, NGOs, legal departments and water companies.



Beginning the cleanup

An ongoing situation

MMM and the pastoral team reached out to people affected by the devastation of the hurricanes. They registered 35 families whose houses were damaged or destroyed. Among these, 15 houses needed to be rebuilt. A project supported by *Miseen Cara* will provide for the rebuilding of houses for 4 families assessed to be most vulnerable. Two are headed by elderly persons and 2 are single female-headed, all with dependents. They include children with special needs. Their family members are currently dispersed amongst relatives and the local community. They need to live together in safe houses. They will be assisted with obtaining their land rights and title deeds. Securing a land title is a very complex process and family conflicts related to land ownership and distribution are common.



Salvaging a home

The new houses will be built on land where there is less risk of flooding. Community members have given building materials such as local stone and will help with labour.

Two independent builders with a reputation for integrity have been recommended. Three houses already have building permission; the other is progressing with a deed for the donated land. The direct beneficiaries will be 95 people.

An ongoing situation

Margaret said, 'Affected persons will continue to receive psycho-social support. This project will support our border work in Honduras as we tackle people's emergency needs and continue to support community members. Social mobilization is the first step in development to recover from conflicts and disasters. It allows people to think and understand their situation and encourages their capacity to address their own needs.'

Sister Margaret concluded, 'We hope that the impact of this mobilization will be in the rebuilding or rehabilitation of other homes in the area.'

A Lifetime of Healing

On 25 February 2021, Sister Doctor Marian Scena, MMM, received the Distinguished Graduate Award from the University College Dublin (UCD) Medical Graduates' Association (MGA). One of 3 awardees for 2020, Marian was originally to be given her award at her 45th class reunion in Ireland during her home leave from Tanzania. The presentations were postponed because of COVID-19 restrictions and Marian also postponed her visit. In late 2020, the MGA decided to present the medals virtually in lieu of the usual Gala celebration.



The UCD MGA Distinguished Graduate Award

According to the MGA award recipients are chosen:

- 'in recognition of their lifelong achievements to medical education, research and/or clinical practice;
- in appreciation of their drive, leadership, commitment and desire to make a difference in society at home and abroad; and
- to celebrate the success and contribution of our most distinguished alumni worldwide.'

Marian trained in Ireland for several years after qualifying in medicine. She has since spent 37 years in Tanzania and is now based at Faraja Centre Community-Based Health Care in Singida. The centre was established to provide HIV/AIDS-related services in Singida Region, beginning in 2002. Later, a survey showed the need for palliative care, especially end-of-life care.

A collaborative approach

After discussions with the government, the Faraja Hospice and Palliative Care Programme began in August 2012 as part of Faraja Centre. Marian is the programme doctor and coordinator. She works with 3 nurses and 34 trained volunteer palliative care workers who visit patients and educate their families. The wider community is being educated about chronic and life-threatening illnesses, end-of-life issues, and how families can be involved in care. The Catholic Diocese of Singida and Singida Municipality now have a high quality palliative care team. Marian emphasized that the programme greatly depends on outside support.

Speaking from Singida at the virtual event, Sister Marian said she greatly enjoyed her medical school experiences. A good training in the basics of medicine helped to prepare her for life as an MMM doctor. Her enthusiasm in learning from others was evident, as was

her willingness to learn on the job! What was also evident was Marian's deep faith and commitment to God. She explained that God has given her skills and she helps when and however she can. After many years practicing clinical medicine, she now finds it a privilege to be with people on their final journey home.



*Sr. Dr. Marian Scena interviewed by class rep
Dr. Bernie Mangan*

Recognizing Excellence

Two other MMMs received awards recently.



Sister Anastasia Essien

Sister Anastasia Essien, presently administrator of the Fuka Primary Health Care Programme in Fuka, northern Nigeria, has been honoured by her professional body, the Institute of Professional Managers and Administrators of Nigeria. Sister Anastasia joined the institute in February 2020 after a rigorous process of examination. In December 2020 she was granted Fellowship. She was unaware beforehand that during the fellowship induction ceremony she would also receive a meritorious award in recognition of her 'selfless contribution to the managerial/administrative profession for the development of humankind'.

Sister Anastasia, from Nigeria, is a seasoned missionary. She has served with our medical services in Uganda and the Republic of Benin as well as in Nigeria. Speaking from Fuka, she said, 'I have learnt through the people of Fuka the true meaning of simplicity and contentment. The people are poor but contented and happy with the little they have.' In her spare time Sister Anastasia enjoys singing in the parish choir and dancing. 'I enjoy it so much when the women's group (*Zumunta Mata*) leads the offertory hymns with special dancing, following the rhythm of their drums.' She also enjoys sewing. The lockdown has given her the opportunity to sew face masks for all the staff and patients.

Soon Anastasia will begin her visa process for Ireland, where she will work at MMM Congregational level to ensure that our health care services worldwide can continue.

Sister Chinye Lumenze from Calabar, Nigeria, has a wonderful name. Chinyene means 'The Lord gives', and Chinye has spent her life thanking God for all she has been given. She is a nurse and midwife, loves music and enjoys physical exercise. After several years on mission in the Republic of Benin as coordinator of primary health care services in Zaffé, Sister Chinye returned to Nigeria and worked in some of our hospitals there before travelling to England in 2019.

Currently she is following a three-year Bachelor of Science programme in child and family health and wellbeing at the University of Derby. In recognition of her excellent academic achievement during her first year, Chinye has received the Pro Vice-Chancellor/Dean's Award. The virtual award ceremony is scheduled for 31 March. We wish her well as she continues her studies.



Sister Chinye Lumenze

***Congratulations to all our Sisters on receiving these awards.
We wish them every blessing in their lives ahead!***

New Approach to an Old Problem

Fuka Primary Health Care Programme serves a rural population in north central Nigeria. A static clinic offers basic health and HIV-related services and there is a 17-village outreach. Many people come from outside the catchment area, including the nomadic, pastoralist Fulani, who often travel great distances. More recently, many internally displaced people arrived, fleeing terrorist attacks.

There is a high incidence of tuberculosis (TB) in the area and a TB unit deals with this preventable and curable disease - one of the world's top infectious killers. There is inpatient accommodation so treatment can be monitored during the first treatment stage. Staff at Fuka became concerned when many patients were not becoming non-infectious after this phase. **In 2018 only 47% were non-infectious.** This was despite careful monitoring, ensuring good nutrition and hygiene, and screening for other illnesses. The estimated conversion rate at national level was 86%.



The MMM community in Fuka

The Sisters shared their concerns at local, state and national levels and discussed possible causes, including drug quality. They became further concerned when some people were still infectious after 6 months' treatment and a patient developed drug resistance. It was suggested that because most patients come from far places and often delay seeking care, they frequently present with advanced disease.

Another challenge was the waiting time at the clinic, causing overcrowding and tension among patients, families and staff. The average was 4 hours but could extend to 6 hours in an emergency. This was difficult for staff, who spent large amounts of time 'keeping the peace'.



Giving health education in the community

Concerted measures

The MMMs and staff visited churches and mosques with information about TB and received great cooperation from religious leaders. Many people with prolonged cough came for investigation. Village health committees encouraged childhood vaccinations.

With support from *Misean Cara* a computerized health management information system (HMIS) was installed at Fuka, with accompanying staff training. It has made services more efficient, with reduced waiting times and improved drug supply management and patient record-keeping. Patient follow-up was better, including the second, outpatient, 4-month treatment phase.

The State trained TB unit staff to record statistics and promised to supply equipment so data can be collated centrally. The government has also promised Fuka a Genexpert machine, which does rapid TB diagnosis and detects drug resistance.

Signs of hope

At an online monitoring visit for Fuka in early 2021, one result stood out. Of the 65 TB patients registered in 2020, **73% were non-infectious** after phase one treatment. Our MMMs in Fuka attribute this change to better patient monitoring and drug adherence, which the HMIS has made possible. Great credit is also due the programme staff who follow-up patients in very challenging circumstances, now compounded by measures to combat COVID-19.



Sister Anne Curtin was born in Dublin in 1932. She worked in a bank before joining MMM in 1952. After profession she trained as a nurse and was assigned to Nigeria in 1961. For several years she worked as a nurse and matron. In 1973 Sister Anne completed an MA in Economics in Social Anthropology, after which she was a university lecturer in Maynooth and Nigeria. She also did mission awareness work in England. Sister Anne then served in Nigeria for 18 years as a hospital administrator.

She was assigned to England in 2001 and was MMM Area business administrator and honourable secretary for the St. Francis Leprosy Guild. Sister Anne returned to Ireland in 2012 and helped in the Motherhouse. She

later transferred to *Áras Mhuire* for nursing care and died there peacefully on 5 December 2020.



Sister Patricia Amadi was born in Owerri, Nigeria on 17 March 1945. Before joining MMM she worked as a nurses' aid and was in charge of the sick bay in a unit for children with kwashiorkor. In 1972 our first MMM novitiate in Nigeria opened. 'Sister Patti' was in the first group of women to join MMM in the new formation house in Ibadan.

After profession she worked in several places in Nigeria, did nurse/midwife training, and was assigned to Malawi in 1993. As she worked in primary health care she saw the scope for clinical pastoral ministry. She trained as a chaplain in the USA and South Africa. For many years Sister Patti worked as a hospital chaplain in Malawi. She returned to Nigeria in 2009. Because of health issues she moved

to Abakaliki in 2019 for nursing by the Sisters there. After a short illness she died on 6 December 2020.

Prayer in Time of COVID-19

O God, I may be well but many around me are sick. I feel helpless to reach out and heal. As each patient struggles to breathe, help them, Lord, through my breathing.

As I breathe in, may your love infuse me. As I breathe out, let this love spread all around me. In and out, in and out. I breathe with and through you, Lord.



*We wish our readers all
the blessings of Easter.*

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Photo credits: MMM Sisters; Screenshots Pg. 4: UCD MGA Distinguished Graduate Award (Virtual) Event - 25 Feb 2021



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