



*And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again,*

*They grieved their losses, and make new choices,*

*And dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully,*

*As they had been healed.*

*Dear Friends,*

This letter comes to you in the midst of the present Covid-19 pandemic we are all experiencing in one way or another. Above is the last verse of a poem written by an Irish Poet, Kathleen O'Meara in 1869 after a plague devastated Ireland in the late 1860's which seems very appropriate for these days. We do hope that spirit does come alive among us as we live through these days.

There are Corona Virus updates on our web-site which indicate how MMM is trying to keep ahead of the pandemic in our various medical projects. In this newsletter, I would like to up-date you on our work with VVF in **Itam in Nigeria**, and share a bit the life of **Sr. Mary Donato MMM** who died in Boston in April from complications of COVID-19.

The effect of the pandemic has changed all of our lives. We realize that and though we truly need your support as always, we have decided to send out one less newsletter this year and dispense with our raffles. It seems more appropriate at this time. This year our MMM Leadership Meetings took place in Ireland in February and we all returned to our home countries just as the pandemic was beginning to engage the world. We did initial planning for the year of preparation for our General Chapter which will be held in Tanzania in April 2021. It is a time of choosing new leadership and setting a direction for the Congregation for the next few years. Even as we made our plans, the pandemic changed many of them. Clearly, God is letting us know our lives are not in our control.

During this time of the pandemic and stay at home order, our staff here, Sister Joyce Zarnik OSF and Mrs. Connie Saldivar have been at home and Sister Kathie and I are doing our best to keep the office going and respond to each of you. One thing I have noticed even more clearly are the seriousness of the prayer requests you make to us, and our equal seriousness to ensure that we do pray for your intentions. When we receive your intentions, they are noted on your file, and every couple of weeks, we send all the requests received out to the MMM world where they are usually printed out and placed in prayer baskets in our chapels or prayer space in our houses in USA, Honduras, Brazil, and other places around the world. It is our custom to pray for all those who are good to MMM each evening when we say Evening prayer. It occurred to me that during this pandemic it was a very good way to keep alive a very real connection and flow of grace and energy... all of which is healing for us. As is said so often these days, "We are in this together". That has been true for MMM and you for many years. Thank you, stay safe and well, and pray for us,

## MEDICAL MISSIONARIES OF MARY

Mission Development Office  
4425 West 63rd St., Ste. 100  
Chicago, IL 60629-5565  
[www.mmmworldwide.org](http://www.mmmworldwide.org)  
[www.facebook.com/medicalmissionariesofmary.usa](https://www.facebook.com/medicalmissionariesofmary.usa)

Summer  
Newsletter  
2020



With gratitude and prayer,

*Sister Joanne*

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM  
Development Director

# A Life Well Lived

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.



Sr. Mary Katherine Donato, MMM

Sister Mary Katherine Donato was born in Coatesville, PA, USA in 1931. She loved fishing and cooking and was very proud of her roots in the beautiful Brandywine Creek area in Pennsylvania. 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 and 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 after the Biafran war. This time she was midwifery tutor in Anua for four years. Back in the USA in 1975, she was vocation director 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 program and at three city community health centers. 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 programs 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 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 Walsh, 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. ■

**Work with all people of good will.  
Join forces with them  
especially in the field of health  
so as to bring about a world of justice and peace  
where true human development is fostered,  
and human dignity and rights  
are respected.**

*MMM Constitutions 9.10*

# GLOBAL REPORT:

## Sisters of Medical Missionaries of Mary provide free surgery to fistula patients

*In March the Global Sisters Report published an article by Kelechukwu Iruoma, a Nigerian free-lance journalist, about the work of MMM in Itam. I would like to share with you some of that article to up-date you on the lives of women being transformed by this work.*

---

Five years ago, Itam Ngoyo (not her real name), from a small community in southern Nigeria, started to defecate and urinate unconsciously and uncontrollably. Ngoyo, who lives 55 kilometers from Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom state in the country's oil-rich region, thought the condition was normal until it persisted. She was worried but due to the stigma, she could not seek medical help. Subsequently, she started feeling sick and losing weight. Then, she concluded it was an abnormal condition that could kill her. Ngoyo, who hails from a community where there is no access to quality health care, visited a few clinics as her health continued to deteriorate. The tall, dark woman visited prophets, who failed to heal her, and herbalists, who gave her medicinal concoctions to drink.

With no improvement to her health condition, Ngoyo was referred by relatives to the Family Life Centre, a fistula and maternal birth injury hospital run by the Medical Missionaries of Mary, a congregation of Catholic sisters dedicated to providing healthcare to the less privileged. At the center, Ngoyo was diagnosed with fistula. "I was told I needed an operation. I was given drugs for two weeks to stabilize my system before I could be operated on," she recounted. "I later returned for the operation and it was successful."

The center operates on about 200 fistula cases annually. "We repair damaged bladders, rectums and the female reproductive organs," said Sr. Sylvia Ndubuaku MMM, the matron of the center. "The goal of sisters of the Medical Missionaries of Mary is to work where the needs are the greatest. We see traumatized women acting as if the world has collapsed on them. Many of them have lost their dignity." For those of you who watch the PBS Series "Call the Midwife", you will remember the story of

the Pakistani woman and her family who endured this and were finally helped. That was 1966 in London, and Ngoyo's story is 2020 in Nigeria. This should not be happening to women today! It is all about access to good health care!

Since less than half of women with fistula, who mostly live in rural areas, are treated, the sisters and auxiliary staff engage in community outreach by visiting villages to scout women with the condition. They also make announcements about their services on local radio and television stations as well as social media. To perform the operations, the center hired Sunday Adeoye, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology and also the recent chief medical director of the National Obstetric Fistula Centre, a hospital in Abakaliki, southeast Nigeria. Dr. Sunday Lengmang, a fistula surgeon at the Evangel Vesico-Vaginal Fistula Center\* in northern Nigeria, also does surgeries at the center.

Cost of transportation to and from the center was identified as a major barrier to fistula treatment. The sisters bought a 16-seat bus to convey patients to the center for treatment.

After the surgery, she says, the sisters adopt the social reintegration method to return patients to their communities. This is to help them fight stigma and overcome social and socioeconomic challenges. Patients spend months at the rehabilitation center to fully recover. The sisters teach them some skills, such as hairdressing, tailoring and baking. At the end of the training, the sisters equip them to return to their communities and start their businesses. "Some of them lost their businesses due to the illness. That is why we teach them some skills and empower them materially and financially so that they can start some businesses when they return home," Sister Sylvia said.

"I feel very happy doing this work," Sister Sylvia said. "It is challenging but I feel fulfilled when I can alleviate the pain from others because that is what God called me to do. Being a sister gives me that freedom."

---

(We thank Global Sisters Report and the author for highlighting this issue...one that is close to the heart of every MMM as we were founded for health of women and children.)



## MEDICAL MISSIONARIES OF MARY

Addresses of Houses in the U.S. • [www.mmmworldwide.org](http://www.mmmworldwide.org)

Medical Missionaries of Mary  
Mission Development Office  
4425 West 63rd Street, Suite 100  
Chicago, IL 60629-5565  
773-735-3712

Fax: 773-735-4661  
e-mail: [mdommm2014@gmail.com](mailto:mdommm2014@gmail.com)

179 Highland Ave.  
Somerville, MA 02143-1515  
617-666-3223  
e-mail: [mmmsomerville@comcast.net](mailto:mmmsomerville@comcast.net)

16 Downey St.  
Malden, MA 02148-2056  
781-912-2173  
[mmminmalden@gmail.com](mailto:mmminmalden@gmail.com)

3410 West 60th Place  
Chicago, IL 60629-3602  
773-737-3458  
e-mail: [mmmchi2015@gmail.com](mailto:mmmchi2015@gmail.com)

Route 1 PO Box 329  
Clinchco, VA 24226-9702  
Tel/fax: 276-835-9312  
email: [srberniekenny@yahoo.com](mailto:srberniekenny@yahoo.com)

### BEQUESTS - Gifts that keep on Giving

Your will ensures that those you love and the institutions you care about receive a portion of your estate when you are gone. Please consider the MMM's as you prepare your will. If you already have a will, contact your attorney about adding a codicil (amendment). The Medical Missionaries of Mary, Inc. (legal name) is a tax exempt entity in accordance with section 501(c) (3) of the IRS code.

For more information please contact:

*Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM  
Mission Development Office  
4425 W 63rd St., Ste 100  
Chicago, IL 60629-5565  
Tel: 1-773-735-3712*

Remember the source  
from which your healing service flows:  
Christ's love in which  
you are rooted and founded  
as individuals and as a community.

(MMM Constitutions 9.11)

