

# MMM

*Rooted and founded in love*



MEDICAL  
MISSIONARIES  
of MARY

SUPPLEMENT TO HEALING & DEVELOPMENT — VOLUME 76 — CHRISTMAS 2015



**Women affected by urban violence in Brazil worked together to create a Nativity scene based on the street where Project Consolation, initiated by MMM, is housed. They invited their neighbours to come to pray the Christmas Novena. We invite you to join them.**

# Healing the Broken-hearted

**'A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted ... because they are no more' (Jer 31:15 NRSV). This quotation strikes a chord with MMMs working with families affected by the consequences of violence.**

Of the 50 cities in the world with the highest murder rates, 19 are in Brazil. Sister Sheila Campbell, co-ordinator of the Consolation Project in Salvador, described activities that bring hope to families, especially mothers, living with terrible violence and bloodshed in her own neighbourhood.

'MMMs have lived and worked in poorer neighbourhoods of Salvador, Bahia since 1996. These areas are marked by violence and a high prevalence of substance abuse. We have been working in Nordeste de Amaralina neighbourhood since 2000 and are known and respected by the people.



*The recycling workshop: Caring for the earth – Caring for each other*

'This two km<sup>2</sup> neighbourhood has an official population of 82,976 (2010), but community leaders say that the current population is around 100,000. They are predominantly young, with 49% under 25 years of age. Only 9% are over 55. Most are of Afro-Brazilian descent, with more than 90% black/coloured (IBGE 2010). Besides the intense problem of violence, including domestic violence, discrimination, and drug-trafficking, there is high unemployment. Functional illiteracy in the State of Bahia is about 14.4% (IBGE, 2012).'

## **Women are disproportionately affected.**

'In Salvador, about 43.5% of households are headed by women. The national average is 33%. In the State of Bahia last year the average monthly income of women was the equivalent of US\$196; the national average male income was US\$495 (PNAD, 2007).



*Women create beautiful products in the community therapy group.*

'The aim of the Consolation Project is to support families living in Nordeste de Amaralina whose members have been assassinated as a result of urban violence. These are usually young sons, caught up in drug trafficking or suspected by the police of drug involvement, who are summarily executed. We have cases of domestic violence and victims of stray bullets because local gangs are heavily armed and the police presence is minimal.



'We help them to deal with their grief and overcome their isolation and stigmatization. When a family member is killed, the natural process of bereavement is disrupted and family disintegration often results. We help families reintegrate into the wider community. Just as important, we provide human rights training, trauma counselling and conflict management.'

### A healing presence

'In listening to mothers and other family members pour out their grief or struggle to come to terms with the finality of it all, team members have become skilled in Active Listening. This therapeutic approach is sensitive, respectful and positive. In pastoral terms, it means recognising Christ's presence in the other, just being present as they go through the mourning process, without giving advice or passing judgement.



*Grieving for those lost to violence: 'We should ask for the grace to weep for this world, which does not recognise the path to peace' (Pope Francis).*



*'The Word became flesh and lived among us' (Jn 1:14 NRSV).*

'We have offered a community therapy group, meeting every two weeks. Handcraft skills enhanced the work and it had a steady attendance. We plan to continue this therapy.

'We also had a recycling workshop, involving people from the larger community. They decided to work together to build a Nativity scene, set in the reality of their area. As the backdrop, they used the small street where we have our centre. When it was finished they invited all the neighbours to come and pray the Christmas Novena. After Christmas they made other items, such as vases, candle holders, and wall plaques.

'We have since included a peace-making workshop, using the theme proposed by the Brazilian Bishops' Conference. It called for all communities, parishes and dioceses to participate in a "March for the Poor and Excluded" . This was held on 7 September, Brazilian Independence Day.

'We are very grateful to our supporters, especially Saint Brigid's Third World Group, based in Belfast, No. Ireland.' Thank you to all who have shared in the process of healing.

# Honouring the Elderly

**'In our changing world, where many elderly people are no longer respected and valued for their presence, wisdom and life experience, we affirm our prophetic witness in the way that the elderly, sick and aging are esteemed and cared for with dignity, both within MMM and in our ministries' (MMM Chapter 2015).**

For fifteen years, MMMs worked among the indigenous Lenca people in Marcala, Honduras - an isolated mountain community. Facing consolidation issues, Sisters Cleide da Silva and Bernadette Heneghan handed over our programmes there and in early 2015 moved to Siguetepeque, closer to our Sisters in Choloma. Bernadette described how they became involved in outreach to the elderly while assessing the needs near their new mission. They discovered the work has an ecumenical dimension.



*A home for the elderly: Basic care is provided and flowers brighten the environment.*

## **A chance encounter**

'We arrived in March and one day I noticed a collection box for the home for the elderly. I jotted down the address and we went for a visit. The home is five kilometres from Siguetepeque in a rural area, about a fifteen-minute walk from the bus stop.

'A local doctor and a group of committed Catholics opened the home thirteen years ago. It provides shelter and care for twenty-three residents in a relaxed family-friendly environment. Most are homeless, abandoned by family, or have no one to care for them. From different parts of the country, each has her or his unique story.



*A devoted couple are able to enjoy their days together.*

'Don Eulalia, a cheerful ninety-four-year old with a twinkle in his eye, has lived in the home since his wife died four years ago. His son, Isaías, who is forty-three, has Down's syndrome and lives with his dad. Their family have never visited.

'Don Efrain and his wife Marie, a delightful couple, have been at the home for five years. They have no surviving children and no other family.



*An elderly woman is able to live with dignity.*

'The police found Juano, a woman in her eighties, wandering the streets of the capital. They took her to the hospital where she had an operation for a brain tumour. She was discharged to this home. She has chronic pain and her face is quite disfigured. She has no family.'

### **A variety of services**

'Mr. Medardo Cuellar and his wife, Alba Luisa, care for the residents. Another woman prepares the meals. They live on the grounds with their families and are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There is such loving interaction between the children and residents.



*Residents caring for each other*

'Local shops provide maize for the tortillas, and rice and beans. The local Lion's Club collect these and deliver them to the home. Mr. Cuellar asked if we could help to supply vegetables, eggs, chickens, cheese, powdered milk, sugar, etc., so they could have a change of menu on Sundays. Some of the residents have had strokes and have difficulty in chewing and swallowing.

'He also asked if we could help with adult disposable nappies, cleaning materials, dressings, and basic medicines. They rely totally on donations to run this home. They are building an extension that will provide for ten more residents. This is being funded by the Mennonites.'



*'A standard of living adequate for health and well-being' - a basic human right*

### **Other issues**

Recently a parish in England expressed interest in working with MMM and was put in contact with Sister Bernadette. Her correspondence revealed some of the other challenges the new MMM community faces.

'We really appreciate your offer to assist the old people. We planned to visit the home the other day. I thought I would take some photos to send with the information in

time for the weekend Masses. Unfortunately we have been without electricity since Friday until now - hence no Internet, and totally beyond my control.'

Sister Cleide and Bernadette, with local resident Toño, have visited many families in the 52 communities in the parish to assess needs. They have begun to answer one of our most important Chapter, and human, calls.



# ‘I have called you by name’ (Is 43:1 NRSV).



Tessa Cornally

In October this year, the Irish Missionary Union held a series of conversations in Arran Quay in Dublin about mission and its lived expression, which is constantly evolving. Many young people feel a call to a cross-cultural experience. Tessa Cornally, 30, from Fermoy, Co. Cork, went to Chimbote, Peru with *Viatres Christi*. Her work involved co-ordinating a childhood education programme and assessing children's nutrition. She shared her understanding of the meaning of mission.

‘Having recently returned from Peru after serving for two years as a lay missionary with the

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, my understanding of the call to mission has certainly evolved. Deciding to leave Ireland and go to a country in another continent, where I didn't know anyone, took a lot of reflection and discernment. I felt the need to go, an urge from deep within myself, to do work which was meaningful, to give my time and energy to a worthy cause.



*Helping with children's literacy: essential to their self-esteem and full participation in society*

‘Of course, the reality of mission is different for each person. I met with trials and tribulations which many find difficult to overcome. I found great comfort in the charism of the Sisters, to be God's hands in the world, to know a God who shares our human experience and walks with us in



*‘The advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed the highest aspiration of the common people’ (Universal Declaration of Human Rights).*

our joys and struggles. Working with the Sisters and in their ministries changed not only my views of mission, but also my spirituality. Their example of living in community, of living simply and working with the economically poor and marginalized, made a huge impact on me.

‘It had always been important for me to do work that I believe in, which is somehow difficult to find in today's society. Being on mission, I felt this every day. I was able to experience the Peruvian culture by serving others in a humble and loving

manner, by being present and sharing my life with them and my community. I will be forever thankful for this experience, which opened my eyes to the call to Mission, and has made a lasting imprint on my being.’

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Photo credits: Tessa Cornally, Sr. Bernadette Heneghan, MMM; Sr. Sheila Campbell, MMM

## ‘Our letter, written on our hearts’ (Col 3:2, NRSV).



**Sister Lelia Cleary** was born Mary Cleary in Kildysart, Co. Clare in 1919. She worked as a nurse-midwife before joining MMM in 1953. She was assigned to Tanzania in 1956 and spent 46 years there, as matron and staff nurse, in several remote hospitals. For almost 20 years she was nurse and then co-ordinator at a health project among the Maasai people.

Sister Lelia returned to Ireland in 2004 and lived in the Motherhouse for 11 years. She was in good health and actively participated in activities there until her rather sudden death on 19 October 2015.



**Sister Giovanni McCormack** was born Anna McCormack in Cambridge, MA, USA in 1929. She later moved to Ballynacorgy, Co. Westmeath. She joined MMM in 1952 and worked in Central Stores in the IMTH and in the Stamp Department before training in occupational therapy and Montessori. Assigned to Nigeria in 1972, she spent almost 24 years in Ogoja helping to rehabilitate adults and children with disabilities.

Sister Giovanni returned to Ireland in 1996. She lived in the Motherhouse and served in leadership for 6 years. Her health began to fail in 2007 and she moved to Aras Mhuire. She died peacefully on 16 November 2015.



**Sister Ita Moore** was born in Ballinasloe, Galway in 1930 and worked as a secretary before joining MMM in 1949. She worked in the hospital office before assignment to Tanzania in 1954. She served there for 13 years and for 5 years in Uganda. She spent 4 years as regional secretary and on mission awareness in the USA. She was appointed MMM Secretary General in 1980 and later spent 7 more years in the USA in fund-raising.

Back in Ireland in 2005, Sister Ita worked as a secretary and in hospitality. She moved to the Motherhouse in 2012 and to Aras Mhuire in March 2015. She died peacefully on 1 December 2015.



At this time of Emmanuel, God with us, we especially remember all those who supported us this year. May God bless you and those you love. In the name of the One who is called Prince of Peace, let us pray and work for peace. Let us ‘ask for the grace to weep for those who live for war and have the cynicism to deny it.’

Pope Francis



- Pray with us.  
We remember you each day.
- Make a donation by mail or online  
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