

MMM

Rooted and founded in love



MEDICAL MISSIONARIES of MARY

SUPPLEMENT TO HEALING & DEVELOPMENT — VOLUME 81 — EASTER 2020



*'Pray for your portion of the Easter Grace ...
Do not give up until all is given you'*

(Catherine McAuley, Sisters of Mercy).

New Life in Kansiira

In March 2019, three pioneering MMMs opened a new mission in Kansiira, Uganda, in the Diocese of Kasana-Luweero. An area of great need with many displaced people, the village of Kansiira has few basic health or social facilities. With a very dry climate there are long periods of drought. When the rains do come, poor roads make journeys and home visits difficult. Yet the Sisters have found, that despite their struggles the people are welcoming, generous and hospitable.

After moving into their new home Sisters Jacqueline, Juliet and Saratu met Kansiira Parish village leaders at a meeting organized by the parish priest. They introduced themselves to the diocesan health coordinator, who guided them on the requirements for diocesan health facilities, and met the district health officer, who promised his support.

From April until the end of August they visited homes in the six villages in Kansiira Parish and the four villages in Kikooge Parish. These visits were part of a household survey to obtain information about the people and their standard of living. They got to know the community members and their views on the new mission.

An important step was taken on 21 August when a contract was signed between MMM and Kasana-Luweero Diocese, making clear that our ministries will be under the direction of the bishop and guided by the diocesan medical policy. When the Sisters have identified needs and have the resources available, they can begin to offer services. The idea is that MMM will initiate a primary health care outreach programme serving Kansiira and neighbouring villages. The Sisters will be responsible for the overall running of the programmes.



Buildings near the lake at Kansiira



Signing the contract with the diocese

Discerning the way forward

They took another step on 18 September, when they met with the parish priest, local chairpersons and village health teams. They shared the findings of the home visits, especially where the community is doing well in terms of health, and what needs improvement, e.g. having proper pit latrines and hygiene, cleaning dishes and eating utensils, and boiling water to avoid water-borne diseases. The participants suggested having four outreach centres for treating minor illnesses and health talks in the community and schools. The Sisters discussed these ideas with the diocesan health coordinator and the Nakasongola

District health officer and are awaiting permission to begin.

In the meantime there are other challenges. The people of Kansiira and neighbouring villages have depended mainly on fishing as their source of income. To preserve the fish stock, in August 2019 the government banned the fishing of small fish in Lake Kyoga and legislated for the use of proper boats

and nets. The military implemented the ban, guarding the lake and burning many boats and nets. This resulted in chaos in the villages and unemployment for many. Most people from different parts of the country who came to fish around the lake returned home. Many others involved in fishing have left the community, greatly affecting socio-economic life.

The villages that use the lake for drinking water face a huge challenge because there are no boats to use to obtain water. Of the nine manual boreholes for Kansiira and Kikooge parishes, eight are not functioning. The people walk until they cannot continue and then take what water they find. Women and children are the most affected because fetching water is their responsibility. Hand or bulldozer-dug pits or holes made during road construction now provide the main source of water. The dry season has begun so these pits usually dry up. Animals also drink from them.

Seeing the bigger picture

Because the people are so dependent on fishing the MMMs plan to help the communities diversify their livelihoods by carrying out a training for transformation programme. The objectives are to enable attitude change and empower people to develop other income generating activities.



Meeting local chairpersons and village health teams



Blessing the chapel for the presence of the Blessed Sacrament

Another challenge seemed to be a lack of commitment from the people for activities. When the MMMs saw the youth deeply involved in the church preparations they took the opportunity to discuss the importance of commitment to the future with them.

As the Sisters await permission from the district, their ministry is one of presence to the people, home visitation to the sick, choir practice and coordination of youth activities in Kansiira. It is a ministry that calls for great patience, understanding and commitment.

Remembering our purpose and inspiration, 18 December 2019 was a memorable day. Rt. Rev. Paul Ssemogerere, Bishop of Kasana-Luweero Diocese, celebrated Mass in the MMM house, blessed the chapel and reserved the Blessed Sacrament. Then, in February 2020 the Catholic community organized fundraising at Mass to build a new church to replace the old church in Kansiira, now a dilapidated mud building. The youth and women cleared a place for the event.



Youth, women and children clear the venue for Mass.

Signs of New Life

The village of Nangwa is in the Manyara Region of Tanzania, 240 kms from the town of Arusha on the main road to Singida. MMMs have been in Nangwa since 1985 and administer the Nangwa Village Health Programme (NVHP). While the programme aims to improve the general health and wellbeing of the community, its main focus is on mother and child health (MCH). These services are free in Tanzania.

At a dispensary on the Nangwa compound antenatal and child welfare clinics are carried out twice weekly, and there is a daily outpatients' clinic, from Monday to Saturday. Sisters and staff also provide monthly mobile outreach in six villages in Hanang District: at Hidet, Qalosendo,



Check out those vaccinations and weight gain!

Mogitu, Gawlolo, Masusu and Matangarimo. In recent years, villagers, government, MMMs and generous donors collaborated in projects to provide easier access to clean water in Matangarimo. (See *Healing and Development*, 2014 Yearbook and 2018 Christmas Supplement.)

Prevention: the key to good health

A healthy mother is able to care for her family. With quality antenatal care, women receive positive health information and concerns are detected early in pregnancy. Mothers are enabled to deliver healthy babies, giving them the best start in life. At the clinics, pregnant women receive iron and folic acid, drugs against malaria and worms, and tetanus toxoid. Through the child welfare clinics, children's growth and general health are monitored. Vaccinations are given against eleven diseases.

The village health programme also offers health education, counselling, and services for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.

Vaccines and antenatal medicines are given free by the government, but often iron and folic acid must be purchased, and sometimes SP - a single dose anti-malarial drug that is highly effective in preventing malaria in pregnancy and reducing the consequences of infection in the mother and baby.

Use of the services

Sister Sekunda Kimario says that the numbers of outpatients, children and pregnant women coming to the clinic are increasing. In 2019 the Sisters and staff saw 2,472 pregnant women and 16,451 children at the base dispensary and 2,295 pregnant women and 13,467 children at the monthly outreach clinics. Numbers of children especially increase each year.



A busy vaccination clinic in Nangwa

The government uses the centre for campaigns and vaccinations. For example, in June and December 2019, there were two campaigns for Vitamin A and de-worming for children under five years of age. In October 2019, the NVHP participated in a countrywide vaccination campaign against measles/rubella and polio. An antiretroviral treatment clinic is held once per month for people with HIV. NGOs occasionally use the centre for dental and eye clinics.

To meet the increasing demands, construction has started on a new RCH (Reproductive Child Health) building to alleviate overcrowding in the dispensary. Furniture, wiring for electricity, and water in the building will be needed.



Sr. Philomena encourages good nutrition on a home visit.



A meeting of the Medford Circle of Friends

Other challenges

Getting to outstations involves long journeys over unpaved rural roads. The 1998 Toyota Landcruiser used by the programme is wearing out and a new vehicle is needed. In early February 2020 Sister Joan Grumbach reported: 'Just last week, we had two punctures and problems with the battery.'

There are usually two rainy seasons in the area: one short season from mid-November to December and one long season in the months of January to March, but weather patterns seem to be changing. The area has frequent droughts. Currently we are hearing of severe locust swarms in East Africa, which will impact the next harvest. Nutrition of large populations, especially women and children, will be affected.

Friends indeed

Many partners make it possible to continue these essential services. Among them is the Medford Circle of Friends in the USA. For many years this dedicated group has helped Nangwa Village Health Programme to purchase medicines for pregnant women, food supplements for underweight children, essential drugs for outpatients and benches for the dispensary.

The Circle is based near our MMM house in Somerville, MA, and members have organized several fundraising events including a recent 'yardless yard sale'. They have also supported our work in Honduras. We are very grateful for their interest and generosity.



Sr. Joan and staff with mothers waiting at an outstation

Sent to Bring Life

On 4 July 1950, the eve of her first voyage to America, our foundress Mother Mary received a letter in Ireland. She told her secretary, 'Reply immediately and ask that young woman if she could meet me at the ship when it docks in New York.' Agnes McKeon, author of the letter, later recalled how she became the first MMM postulant in the USA.

Agnes was born in Co. Leitrim in 1924. While she was small, her oldest brother, Paddy, left for America. He wrote home frequently but never returned. Agnes knew that someday she would go to America and meet this brother. She trained as a nurse in England, and while working there in 1948, another nurse told her about a film called *Visitation*. 'She told me about Sisters called Medical Missionaries of Mary who worked in Africa with people who had leprosy. I thought that would be a worthwhile thing to do with my life. But not yet. I was still saving up so I could go to America and meet this brother of mine.



Sr. Agnes McKeon

'Eventually I bought a ticket to New York. That was the autumn of 1949. When I landed at Idlewild Airport [now JFK], I looked at all the people waiting. "That man over there," I thought, "looks a bit like Mammy." I went over to him and asked, "Are you waiting for someone?" "Yes," he said, "I am looking for my sister, Agnes." "I'm Agnes McKeon," I said.

'I met his wife and two-year-old daughter. My sister-in-law was expecting a new baby and was worrying about who would mind the toddler. So I decided to stay with them for as long as I was needed. Then I got a nursing job with the Franciscan Sisters at Far Rockaway.' Agnes was now saving for a return ticket to Ireland to join MMM. She wrote to Mother Mary in Drogheda.



Agnes as a postulant in Boston

Fast forward to 11 July 1950

The *Mauritania* was due in New York and Agnes went to the dock. A note from Mother Mary said she could not disembark so would Miss McKeon please return next morning. Agnes remembered, 'I went to the shipside again [and] eventually Mother Mary and Sister Stella [then a novice] disembarked.' Later Mother Mary told Agnes a lot about the Congregation. 'She asked me to come back in two weeks and she would give me all the details about entering the Medical Missionaries of Mary. To my surprise when we met the second time I found that she had the date set for me to enter on September 14th, not in Drogheda as I had thought, but in Boston! ... I took the train from New York to Boston and then a taxi to Number 36 Commonwealth Avenue.

'Mother Mary and Sister Stella came out to meet me. There were just the three of us in that big house until more Sisters began to arrive from Ireland to form the first community of MMMs in America. I remained there for six months, and at the end of March 1951, I was told that I would do my novitiate in Ireland. I was so disappointed. I loved

America and I said, "If I ever leave MMM I will come straight back here." But I never wanted to leave or do anything else with my life because this way I could do what I wanted most, to help people who were sick in places where there was nobody else to do it.'

Agnes spent over 30 years in Angola and was there through the 27-year civil war. She later volunteered in Our Lady of Lourdes

Hospital in Drogheda for 24 years and helped in *Áras Mhuire*. In July 2019 she moved to *Áras Mhuire* for care and died there peacefully on 11 February 2020.



Sr. Agnes (L), other MMMs and friends in Angola



Sr. Veronica Keaney was born Brigid Keaney in Ballindoon, Sligo, in 1927. She worked as a catering supervisor before joining MMM in 1957. After profession she served in the internunciature in Ethiopia for 5 years. She did promotion work in Ireland and fund raising and promotion work in the USA before training in community development in Nova Scotia.

Assigned to Tanzania in 1976, Sr. Veronica coordinated women's development programmes in Arusha Diocese. She then coordinated MMM fund raising in Ireland for 5 years. Returning to Tanzania in 1990 she worked in HIV education and served in MMM leadership.

Veronica returned to Ireland in 1998 and worked in *Áras Mhuire* until 2004. She helped in the Motherhouse until 2013, when she transferred to *Áras Mhuire*. She died there peacefully on 19 November 2019.



Sr. Sheila Cotter was born Julia Cotter in Cork City in 1934. After completing a commercial course she worked as a bookkeeper and in various sections of Cork County Council before joining MMM in 1962. After profession she trained in laboratory technology. She was assigned to Nigeria in 1973 and worked in several mission hospitals for a total of 10 years as a senior laboratory technician. She also did mission awareness and promotion work in Ireland and the USA.

Sr. Sheila returned to Ireland in 1994. She was based in Crumlin in Dublin for 21 years, where she worked as a home nursing aid, as a hospice volunteer and in the MMM Communications Department. In 2015 she moved to the MMM Motherhouse in Drogheda and in 2016 to *Áras Mhuire* nursing facility for further care. She died there peacefully on 1 February 2020.

We wish our readers all the blessings of Easter.

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