



Cover Photo:

(Top Left) Kathie Shea, MMM with children at the celebration;

(Bottom Left) Current MMMs in Brazil: Nilza, Maria Jose, Liana and Cleide;

(Far Right) Anna Friel, MMM, with Brazilian friends in the early years of the mission.

## MEDICAL MISSIONARIES OF MARY

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Spring/Summer  
Newsletter  
2019

*Dear Friends*

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your  
one wild and precious life? ~ Mary Oliver*

The line above from the famous poet, Mary Oliver, who died earlier this year, has always been a favorite of mine and I am not alone in that! To describe our lives as “wild and precious” and to suggest that we can make choices about how we want to allow that life to unfold is deeply meaningful. It can give each day a more profound direction. MMM celebrates the wild and precious Life that has unfolded in Brazil over the last 50 years. It is our year of Jubilee in Brazil!

Medical Missionaries of Mary first went to Brazil in 1969. Today, our work in Brazil is in the north-eastern state of Bahia on the periphery of the city of Salvador, the state capital. Many MMM's, volunteers and Associates have been a part of the story of Brazil. It was here that we made a conscious effort to integrate our charism of “healing” with the call of the Social Teaching of our Faith to live in solidarity with the poor.

“Latin America was seen as a whole new venture for MMM providing hope not only to our young novices coming up, but for our veteran missionaries, who had done such tremendous, pioneering work in Nigeria and who were now at home feeling very low after the war in Biafra.” (Sister Ann Moran MMM) In Central Administration there were two bulging files of requests, pleading for MMM to help the church in Latin America.

After much reflection, discussion, consultation, **Sisters Brigid McDonagh MMM** and **Sheila Lenehan MMM** left for São Paulo on August 17, 1969 and thus the MMM story in Brazil began. It was indeed a wild and precious life and it has touched the hearts of many.

So here we are 2019 with much to celebrate and much for which to give thanks. In February 2019, MMMs, Associates (AMMMs) and friends gathered to mark 50 years of MMM life and ministry in Brazil, South America's largest country. **Sr. Sheila Campbell MMM**, who served for many years in Brazil, said that they celebrated ‘not with Carnival and football, the usual Brazilian manner, but in warm, intimate and joy-filled ceremonies in the parish church of Santo André (St. Andrew), in the crowded, noisy neighbourhood of Nordeste de Amaralina, Salvador, and in a small semi-rural chapel of the basic Christian community of Planaltina, Capim Grosso.’

We thank God for the many people who contributed to the healing of body, mind, and spirit that has taken place in so many lives during these 50 years. And I thank you for making all of it possible.



With gratitude,

*Sister Joanne*

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM  
Development Director

# Celebrating 50 Years – BRAZILIAN STYLE!

**S**ister Sheila Campbell, MMM represented MMM USA and with her 40 years of experience in Brazil was delighted to be back for the celebrations. We share her story.

“Recently, MMM celebrated 50 years of life and ministry in Brazil, not with Carnival and football, the Brazilian stereotypes, rather it took place in small, warm, intimate and joy-filled ceremonies in our parish church of Santo André (St. Andrew), in the crowded, noisy neighborhood of Nordeste de Amaralina, Salvador and in a small semi-rural chapel of the Basic Christian community of Planaltino, Capim Grosso. Our parish is in a poor pocket of Salvador surrounded by wealthier districts, so both the parish priest and the people were delighted that we chose to celebrate with them, rather than chose a more affluent and accessible church.

The first weekend was to include the Final Profession ceremony of **Sr. Nilza dos Santos**. Sr. Nilza comes from the more rural Capim Grosso, but had spent several years of her formation period in Salvador and was one of the founding members of Projeto Consolação, an MMM response to the trauma many families go through following assassination of a family member. Nilza is well known in the parish and the Sisters decided to prepare for the actual ceremony with two days (a short tridium!) of vocation promotion.

On the first day, all ten MMMs assembled. Four lived in Salvador: Sisters Gladys, Jacinta, Liana and Nilza. Two came from our Congregational Leadership Team in Ireland: **Sisters Siobhan and Mary Ann**, and two came from the USA, **Sisters Kathie and Sheila**. Our other Brazilian sisters came: **Sister Cleide** from Honduras and **Sister Maria Jose** from Uganda. Our parish priest, **Fr. João Pedro**, said the Mass and, after communion, local children presented in drama form the story of Mother Mary and our foundation. There



Sister Sheila Campbell MMM celebrating.



Telling the story of MMM in Brazil.

was an 8 year old dressed as Mother Mary in a full MMM habit including grey veil and white collar! When the narrator came to the part of Mother Mary suffering from ill health all her life, the actress slumped down in her chair and gave a whimpering cough! Very realistic!

The Mass on the second night was said by Fr. William, a priest from a neighboring parish. Again the youth of the parish had another theatre piece, this time on the Life and Mission of MMM over these 50 years, both in São Paulo and in Bahia. Actors entered representing **Sisters Brigid and Sheila**, the first MMMs and also **Sisters Cleide and Maria José**, the first Brazilian MMMs. Around a huge paper map of Brazil were photos of the early sisters and their ministries and, one by one, small children broke through the paper map and held up posters of all the ministries MMM have been involved in while a narrator read them out. It was an impressive list and humbling to realize that we actually had made a wonderful contribution to the Brazilian church over these last 50 years.

The third day was the celebration of the Final Profession of Sister Nilza dos Santos. The celebration was led by Dom Marco Eugênio, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Salvador. Nilza's mother and two sisters were present, as well as people from the parishes of Capim Grosso, Cabaceiras do Paraguaçu, and even representatives from São Paulo which is over 2000 kilometers away! Other priests celebrating were **Fr. Tony Terry, SPS**, and **Frs. Xavier and Alexandre S.J.** The cake was cut in the parish hall after the ceremony and the celebrations were the usual mix of hugs and kisses, finger food, lemonade and shouts of joy as old friends met each other and new friendships were forged. The Associate MMMs outdid themselves in the organization of everything!

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**Our Congregational Leader there for these celebrations, Sister Siobhan Corkery MMM, who spent many years of her life in Brazil as well as ministering in Nigeria and Rwanda. She spoke during the celebrations and I share some of her words with you.**

"I want to thank each and every one of you for coming here today to join hands with us in Thanking God for God's faithfulness to us during these last 50 years. It is a special day in the life of MMM and these last few days we have been recalling the many ways God was present with us on this journey. Today is a special day for us in this our Jubilee Year as Nilza commits herself to God for life as a Medical Missionary of Mary – the first from Bahia. I thank you, her family, that nurtured Nilza's Vocation especially her mother Dona Josefa and father Miguel who has died, her brother and sisters as well as the people of God... Today Nilza has taken a great leap in Faith and this will require great trust in God on a daily basis.



Sister Nilza with her Mom and family.

Our first MMM mission was in Sao Paulo and as we recall MMMs journey there we give thanks for the lives of the people in the Basic Christian Communi-

ties there, with whom we worked...we give thanks for the bishops, priests and Sisters who shared the same mission and committed to liberation Theology. Permit to thank in a special way the St. Patrick's Missionary Society represented here today by Fr. Tony Terry SPS. It was the Sr. Partick's Missionaries who invited MMM to Brazil. I also wish to thank the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary who were so supportive to us especially in the early days/years.



MMM Sisters and Associates celebrate Nilza's final profession.

MMM is an international Congregation and our multicultural living in community is important to us. Today we are 10 MMMs of four different nationalities; Brazilians, Nigerians, Americans and Irish. In each encounter, and in each experience, the richness, beauty, values and culture of the MMM tradition also become part of the women who choose this way of life. When this happens, the courage of our Sisters, the stories and collective wisdom of the group is the treasure that the Congregation offers to the universe and especially to those who are called to express the way of life of the MMM, the MMM Associates and the people with whom we network in mission. With each encounter we are co-creating MMM and all of Creation."

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The day after the Final Profession was a Sunday, and Fr. Tony Terry came to our house in Amaralina to say Mass for us. It was truly a moment to celebrate history

as Fr. Tony was one of the St. Patrick's Missionary Society priests (Kiltegens) who had visited Drogheda back in the late 1960's requesting MMMs for the Brazilian missions. He reflected on the contribution MMM had made over the years and emphasized the empowering of women and our contribution to health care when the Government was unable to provide it.

The last of the celebrations was a week later in Capim Grosso, in the small community of Planatino where

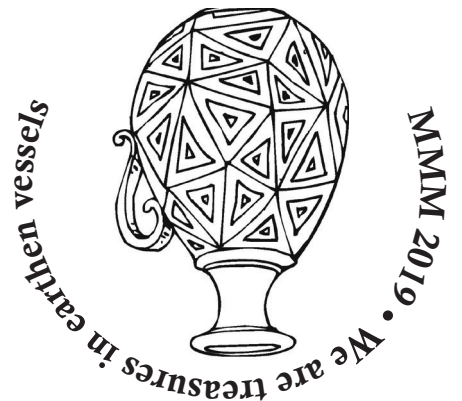
MMM had lived for over 30 years. Again the AMMMs organized the day and the Mass was said by Frs. Xavier and Alexandre, SJ. Once more it was a joyful reunion for many MMMs and the local people. A surprise during the Mass was the arrival of the Sisters' car – an old Volkswagen Beetle – borrowed back from the family who bought it, and driven right into the church during Mass!!

Those of us who came from outside of Brazil were honored and humbled to be present for all the ceremonies. A deep sense of gratitude pervaded the whole time and hope and optimism for the next 50 years ahead. ■



...our Area Business Administrator, also represented MMM USA at the celebrations.

"My overall memory of my visit Brazil – Salvador can be captioned in two words – "warmth and communication". The sky was blue and the days and nights were quite warm but the "warmth" of the people I met was extraordinary. Few of the people I met could speak English and I could not speak Portuguese yet we were able to communicate with "Abraços" (hugs), "apertos de mão" (handshakes) and "gestos" (gestures). The simplest of ways to engage with strangers and yet so effective in making a stranger feel at home and forget the heat of the day and night and instead feel the warmth of a new friendship."



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