



Dear Friends

*"We must undertake the struggle in all parts of the world, wherever we may be, because we have no other spare or replacement planet. We have only this one, and we have to take action."
~ Berta Cáceres (1973-2016)*

The Medical Missionaries of Mary first went to Honduras following the devastating Hurricane Mitch, which struck the country back in 1998. Our first experience in Honduras was related to the effects of climate change and it is women like Berta Cáceres and many Hondurans who, to this day, continue to inspire us to stay there in solidarity with people whose lives are so difficult.

Today, six MMM Sisters work in Honduras. They are Sisters Renée Duignan and Bernadette Heneghan from Ireland, Sister Rosalinda Gonzales from the Philippines, Sister Cleide da Silva from Brazil, Sister Danielle Darbro from the USA and Sister Margaret Nakafu from Uganda. It was my home for five years and it is still a blessing to know and work with such wonderful people in my annual trips there.

Our first mission was established in the parish of Marcala in the western part of the country. The parish had an excellent development plan, and the MMMs were involved in the healthcare component. This meant providing workshops, training, and health monitoring over an extensive rural area.

An important aspect of the work was the production of low-cost remedies from local plants. We undertook this work at the request of the local people who already had a rich tradition in local remedies, but feared it was being lost because the younger generation was not picking up the skills of their elders. "Please help us reclaim the knowledge of our ancestors about plants that cure." That was the first request the people made to us.

It has been an exciting adventure as we worked with the local people to develop parish health teams. In 2015, facing issues of consolidation, MMM made a decision to hand over our programs in Marcala to well-trained local people and to move closer to our Sisters in Choloma. In March that year, Sisters Cleide and Bernadette arrived in **Siguatepeque**. After reviewing the Needs Assessment (21 communities) and the team's experiences during the

community visits (41 communities) meetings with the Mayor, Health Personnel and the Parish Priest of **Meámbar**, 15 communities were selected where we would begin to form youth and women's groups, get to know the communities and the people in this vast area of forests and mountains. The main focus of the project is Awareness Raising and Capacity Building of the team, the women and youth (families) on Health, Human Development, Human Rights, Violence, Gender and Care of the Environment.

Our second mission is in Choloma, in the Diocese of San Pedro Sula, where we have built *Casa Visitación*, a center providing a range of services as well as a clinic. Health committees have been established in surrounding barrios. Activities include training of health teams, supervision of home pharmacies, counselling and building self-esteem, complementary therapies, work with prisoners, and addressing domestic violence.

One of the joys of living and working Honduras is the generosity of the people who volunteer their time with a willingness to learn new skills. Another joy is the deep faith that has led to the creation of MMM Honduran Associates who hunger for a spirituality that feeds their lives and struggles to live their faith.

Sister Renee Duignan has been in Honduras since the very beginning. In this newsletter, we share her story as we celebrate and rejoice with her this year...50 years of MMM life and commitment and what a life it is! Enjoy,



Sister Joanne

Development Director

Front Panel Photo:
For these Children,
the future of Honduras,
Berta Cáceres gave her life
inspiring MMM in our own
life and work there.

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Summer 2017

Sister Renee Duignan tells her story:



Renee Duignan MMM celebrating life as she does so well!

I remember how my father used to take off his hat while working in the fields to say the Angelus when the bell would ring out over the countryside. I remember the smell of freshly baked bread my mother made every other day. I am grateful to all my family for supporting me in my decision to leave home when not quite 18 years old. I felt trusted and would try to live up to that trust throughout my life.

In 1961 I arrived in New York and worked in a bank for 3 years; it was for me an exciting time, learning about other cultures and other ways of being. During that time I met the St. Patrick Fathers and did some volunteer work helping to raise funds for the missions. Though I loved to dance at the weekends, I felt a restlessness in me that could be named the beginning of a call to something different. A deep awareness of all I had received in my own life motivated me to respond to God's call to share with those most in need. I was deeply impressed with Martin Luther King whom I had listened to at a rally in New York City and Pope John XXIII who spoke of the great needs of the church in Latin America. Both of these men influenced my decision to enter the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Boston in 1964.

I was to learn there the joys and demands of our MMM missionary vocation which resonated deep within me. After my first profession I returned to Ireland and

continued my formation doing nursing and midwifery. MMM, Drogheda in those days was full of life and preparation for life on the missions. We all awaited eagerly for the day we would hear about our assignment and mine was to Malawi in Africa where I spent 10 wonderful years. We lived in a dictatorship which was particularly difficult for the local people. My first assignment was to Nkata Bay to a health clinic, a maternity unit and dispensary with no doctor. It was challenging and many times we had to use all our skills (some we never knew we had) and pray our way through some of the cases. I later worked in our hospital in Mzuzu together with a great community of MMM, the local people and many volunteers from different countries. It was a rich experience of hospitality especially being with and learning from the Malawian people.



The MMM Community in Honduras celebrating Danielle's renewal of vows: Sisters Rosalinda, Bernie, Cleide, Renee, Margaret and Danielle...a very international group.

In 1985, I was called to be a member of our Leadership Team based in Ireland. I served in that role for 12 years. It was a privilege which brought me in contact with all our Sisters at home and abroad seeing first hand our healing charism unfolding in different countries and cultures despite wars and difficult situations. It was interesting too to experience the changes that came about with the introduction of Prima-

ry Health Care and how we as MMM's responded so enthusiastically thus making health care more widely available.

The next step on my journey brought me to Mexico spending 6 months learning the Spanish language and beginning to learn something of the Latin American culture. There were four of us on this journey, 3 MMM's and a laywomen. It was a special time

of discernment when we were called again to take another step on this journey and go to Honduras in 1998 in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. Marcala in the South west of the country was our mission of choice. We worked with the social wing of the Catholic Church which afforded us an entry into the communities of indigenous Lenca people living mostly in the mountainous area of the region. I ministered there

News and Up-dates from the MMM World

The story of MMM in Honduras and a charitable organization called HOPE are inextricable connected.

In the words of Gerry O'Shea, founding member: *"The year 1847 is still spoken of as Black 47 by Irish people. It was the worst year of the Gorta Mor or Great Hunger when thousands of people died in the streets and so-called workhouses which were supposed to provide relief. They died also in what were sadly called coffin ships making their way to what they hoped would be a better life in America."*

In 1997, the 150th anniversary, these horrible events were commemorated throughout the world. How could tens of thousands die when the island was producing plenty food? Researchers found abundant evidence of emaciated people collapsing from hunger in Irish towns and villages. Realizing that world hunger is still a huge problem and that thousands of children still die every day from malnutrition, a few Irish people in Yonkers, New York started HOPE, determined to help out with families in dire circumstances.

While HOPE is a non-sectarian organization, the early members were all Catholics and they reached out to the Medical Missionaries of Mary for advice and counsel on how best to proceed. They met Sr. Joanne Bierl who not only provided advice but also an excellent development project in Choloma near San Pedro Sula, Honduras which she and her colleague Sr. Renee Duignan were beginning to develop.

That was the beginning of a very strong connection between the MMM's and HOPE. Some Members of HOPE who number



Visitors from HOPE in NY, Vincent, Pat and Gerry visit Eva and her daughter with Renee. Eva's son Melvin, 19, has continual convulsions (since age 3) and is unable to talk, walk, or care for himself. Caring for him is a full time job for Eva. We help pay for his medications and Eva participates in the activities of Casa Visitación such as care for the carer and the women's support group.

about 25 have visited Casa Visitación in Choloma almost every year since the organization was started and it has provided financial assistance for the excellent family-support programs Casa Visitación has developed there".

HOPE has been and continues to be a blessing in the lives of MMM and we are deeply grateful to them. ■

Renee: Continued from previous page.

for 5 years; our work was mostly in health education and, at the request of the local people, learning to make natural medicines using the plants of the area. Together we found ways to improve the lifestyle of these people. As they learned from us, I learned much from them and came to appreciate this new culture. Our manner of being with them brought us close to understanding their joys and struggles. In 2004 we founded a second community in Choloma in the North of Honduras; I moved there and remain to this day. Here in Choloma it is a totally different reality, most of the people are migrants who have come to find work in the factories. We are living in one of the most violent areas of the world, many people living in extreme poverty, lacking employment and caught up in the drug scene, many young people losing their lives in the process. The breakdown in family life is

a contributing factor to much domestic violence. We constructed a center for integrated health care, *Casa Visitación* and from this center our priority is health and human rights education, as well as some curative and complimentary therapies.

I have heard it said that mission is friendship and I can now truly say that is the reality of my life now, it nourishes my spirit to experience the depth of faith among those around me who radiate joy in spite of the many struggles that is their daily reality. As I celebrate 50 years of religious life in MMM with the wonderful memories of this adventure, I give thanks to God, to my family, to my MMM Sisters, friends, our benefactors and many companions along the way who have accompanied me on this journey. ■



The future of Honduras...

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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.

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The Comprehensive Education Reinforcement Program of Casa Visitación (Proyecto Integral del Reforzamiento Escolar or PIRE) provides professional educational, psychological and medical services, as well as recreational activities, holistic dynamics, educational materials, and nutritious snacks to children in First to Sixth Grades struggling in school who come for consultation at our Psychology Clinic or are referred by teachers from schools that we collaborate with. These are the children on the program in 2017 who are flourishing with the extra help!



Comprehensive Education Reinforcement Program