



THE HEALING TOUCH

The Newsletter of the Medical Missionaries of Mary



MMM

Worldwide News

News from MMM Areas



NIGERIA

Itam: The Family Life Centre and V.V.F. Unit has held its first Free Surgery Camp of 2022 to help women who suffer from obstetric fistula caused by prolonged or obstructed labour during childbirth. Last year 140 women were treated. Seventy-eight women were completely cured and the rest continue in medical and surgical treatment programmes. Thank you to our donors who help fund these camps. Read the story of one of the patients inside **on page 3.**

Fuka: Our Sisters have been having communications difficulties. All their equipment was broken or stolen in a raid last year and since

then they have had to travel to the nearest town, Minna, even to make a phone call. There is still unrest in the area.

BRAZIL

Salvador:

Massage therapy, as well as psychological support, is being offered to mitigate high stress levels caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Read Sr. Bernadette's report on **page 3.**

KENYA:

Nairobi: In October last year the local Government in the Mukuru area began a program of slum clearance to build a new road. It was an effort to improve the living conditions of

the thousands of shanty dwellers who dwell in the area. However, the short-term effects were unforeseen.

Little warning was given before the demolition started. Luckily the Sisters, with the help of community members, manage to save the equipment from the building used for Mother and Child Health programmes. The building itself, however was brought down. Read more on **page 4.**

TANZANIA: This year MMM is celebrating 75 years in Tanzania. Congratulations to all our Tanzanian Sisters and Associates.

On Our Feet



Sr. Patricia O'Connor at work

Chiropody (podiatry) is the form of medical treatment that keeps us on our feet! It helps keep us upright, marching through life and its challenges. Some of our MMM Sisters take this on as a “second career” and provide an invaluable service, especially to the elderly.

Podiatrists are healthcare professionals who have been trained to diagnose and treat abnormal conditions of the feet and lower limbs.

They also prevent and correct deformity, keep people mobile and active, relieve pain and treat infections. They can give advice on how to look after your feet and what type of shoes to wear. They can also treat and alleviate day-to-day foot problems. (NHS, UK)

According to a study from the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, in young people as well as the elderly, the muscles in the leg can weaken by a third during a two week period of inactivity.. Therefore movement is very important. So if a person has an ingrown toenail, corns, or other foot problems, then walking (movement) becomes difficult and often impossible. The chiropodist plays an important role in relieving the pain involved.

Sr. Patricia O'Connor and Sr. Corona O'Brien have been providing this service in Drogheda, Ireland for many years. Sr. Patricia was already a trained nurse with wide

experience before entering MMM in 1968. In 1971 she was assigned to Tanzania, later Kenya. In 1996 she returned to Drogheda to look after our sick and elderly MMMs. During her time as clinic Sister in Drogheda, she became aware of the podiatry

needs. “I enjoy chiropody very much. It is great to see people up and moving around. When you can keep people mobile, they have better overall health.”

Sr. Corona is also a trained nurse. She spent many years in Tanzania and Nigeria. In Nigeria she was involved in complementary therapies and on her return to Ireland became involved in chiropody through watching Sr. Patricia's work and seeing the huge need. She combines this work with massage therapy and works to keep the person pain-free, mobile and agile. “People are so grateful when they have their feet treated. At times I am overwhelmed by how much such a small difference can make in their lives. Elderly people often can not bend down enough to reach their feet. Others have poor eyesight. I enjoy my work.”



Patricia as a young nurse in Tanzania



Sr. Corona O'Brien

Uyai's Story

“My name is Uyai (not original name). I am twenty six years old. I am married and this was my first pregnancy. I had this sad experience of VVF for six months. I was pregnant and during labour, I went to a prayer house to deliver. This happened when the doctors during my AnteNatal visit warned me that I can only deliver through Caesarean Section (C/S).

The prophetess in the prayer house prophesied that I should not go back home and also I should not go to the hospital for the C/S. So I remained there in the prayer house for three days. The baby's head was in between my legs and could not come out. On the fourth day, the baby had died, and I was rushed to a hospital where the body of the baby was taken out. I was unconscious for two days, and the following day when

I regained consciousness, I struggled to wake up on my own but I couldn't because all the muscles on my legs were very weak. From then I discovered that I could not control urine and feces anymore, neither could I stand up or walk.

A terrible experience. I lost hope of living and never wanted to see anybody again, even my husband. He encouraged me to stay at the prayer house. I was just waiting to die when my husband came in one day and begged me with tears to please follow him to one hospital called VVF. I finally agreed and that is how I have become a normal person again. I can walk and I am dry'. 'I do not know how to thank this hospital. The six months with VVF was like ten years in hell for me and they brought me out from there'.



Uyai in recovery



Sr Sylvia (matron) and baby



Post operative ward in Itam

Treating Covid-19 Related Stress

by Sr. Bernadette Fadegnon MMM

It all began with a thought, listening to how people expressed the way they felt. They were tense and anxious, because of the excess stress generated by the pandemic.

This touched me deeply because for me as a Medical Missionary of Mary. Our Congregation has a Charism directed towards healing. It calls me to do anything that I could to relieve some of the suffering of people in this time of need. I observed and reflected on how I could help and I now offer my learnings, giftedness and passion to help those in need of healing.

Massage is an alternative way to release many from severe stress after they have been accompanied by a psychologist, I thought.

The community supported my initiative. A letter was drawn up for announcing in our local parish. The letter was addressed to the parish priest and offered free massage sessions for adults over 18 years of age as a way to contribute to their physical, emotional and psychological health and reduce the stress caused by the pandemic. The venue for this therapy was the Parish Pastoral Centre (Casa da Juventude). It was also emphasized in the announcement that all Covid-19 protocols would be observed as far as possible. Each beneficiary was to come with their own towel or bedsheet. Any person having symptoms of Covid-19 or influenza was not to sign up for the massage therapy.

One of our former staff Ana is very active in the parish and I could remember her joy and excitement when I shared the idea with her. She advised me that if this is announced in the Church, everybody will want to come for it. It would be better to let some of them that know the people who are in real need get in touch with them and put them in the roster according to the times and days we have drawn up.

According to the plan, it was to be a three-week programme, two weeks in December and one week in January. Within a couple of days, the list was filled up for two weeks in December; Monday to Saturday two massages daily in the

morning period.

The news went round the neighbourhood as those who have benefited went on sharing about the good news to the extent that when we opened the list for the remaining one week of January, the roster was filled up in a day.

It is like the attitude of Andrew in the Bible to whom John the Baptist pointed out Jesus. After Andrew had had a positive influence, he went to call his brother Simon Peter to come and experience the same. Many of the women, after receiving the massage, tell their neighbour who is in



Sr. Bernadette Fadegnon, Brazil, massage therapy

need of such therapy. Some will ask right there after the session, if there is a space for them to put down the name of someone they know who needs massage therapy. Some will tell the neighbour or relative to come and inquire if there is still space.

A total number of 34 women benefited from this action during these two months.

This has given me a sense that I could offer something very good and important to people in time of need without much financial resources, except my own good energy and passion for what I know best to do. This initiative has shown me that massage therapy is one of the real needs as a response to the effect of Covid in our world. As we continue to pray for the end of Covid, we ask the Lord to grant us the wisdom to diligently continue to respond in a way that prevents the spread of this unwanted guest which has come to stay with us.

Change Can Happen

Mukuru slum has attracted an influx of people from rural areas in search of opportunities in the city due to its proximity to Nairobi's Industrial Area. The industries provide casual labourers with daily wages, other people engage in petty trade and hawking, to feed, clothe and entertain the thousands of inhabitants. Poverty is widespread, with a population density of about 50,000 people per square mile, housing is congested. They are mainly from semi-permanent materials, iron sheets, mud, wood and plastic, resulting in poorly ventilated buildings susceptible to destruction by flooding/fires. Six people may be occupying one single room measuring 3 by 4 square meters, a room that performs various functions from cooking to sleeping. The road network is bad; there is no drainage system, no solid waste disposal facilities, and no proper garbage collection equipment. This combination of factors poses a serious threat to the health and well-being of the population, especially for children, pregnant women and those who are ailing.

When the clinic building was taken down, the Sisters first concern was to maintain the health services they provide in the community. Two containers were immediately stripped of their contents and converted into a makeshift clinic. In December, using iron sheets and wood, a temporary building was erected for the



Demolished MCH building



Improvised fence after demolition

Mother and Child clinic and the two containers were available for other services for the pregnant women of the area. Many are HIV positive and a special programme is run to prevent Mother to Child transmission. There is voluntary HIV testing for pregnant women on their first antenatal visit.

Many families, unfortunately, had their dwellings destroyed at this time and this had led to great unrest in the area, particularly among the youth. There have been episodes of vandalism, protests and further

destruction of property by the protesters themselves. The Sisters are now looking at ways to encourage the community leaders to channel some of this energy into more life promoting activities. With civil unrest, many clients are defaulting from attending the clinic and looking after their health needs.

Presently the Sisters are looking for funds to rebuild the clinic, and have the necessary clearance from the local authorities.



Improvised MCH



Container used for PMTCT services

Meet the Sisters



Sr. Irene Balzan

Meeting Sr. Irene Balzan for the first time, one is struck by a certain calmness and peace. Some say “contained” and most agree she is very competent. This comes from her family but also from the long years she spent as a child, teenager and young woman developing her spiritual life and discerning her life’s vocation.



Sr. Irene Balzan comes from Malta, a small island in the Mediterranean Sea, a stepping stone between Europe and Africa. Her hometown is called Zebbug, meaning olives, and derives from the number of olive groves that surrounded the church and the town centre. It is one of the oldest towns in Malta. She has only one brother but grew up in a multi-generational household with parents, grandparents, aunt and uncle.

She describes herself as having a very happy childhood. She was raised as a Catholic, schooled by religious Sisters and encouraged in all she wanted to achieve in life by her parents. As a young woman she was attracted to Taize meditation and did the Caminho pilgrimage between France and Spain. She knew early on that she wanted religious life but was unsure where or how until she came across a newspaper article about MMM and she resonated straight away with the spirit and work of the Congregation.

Sr. Irene did her early Nurse education in Malta before joining MMM. After her initial religious formation in Ireland, Uganda and Kenya, she came to Ireland to complete her midwifery studies. Then came her first missionary assignment, to Urua Akpan in Nigeria. “It was very much plunging in at the deep end and relying on one’s own personal resources”, Irene remembers. This experience founded the building blocks of resilience which stood by her in the years that followed. Sr. Irene did well in Urua Akpan and was chosen to go to a new



Sr. Irene Balzan with guitar

mission, recently started by three other MMMs, in the Republic of Benin. Although a neighbouring country to Nigeria, it was French speaking and had different cultures and traditions.

After seven years in the Republic of Benin and further educational studies in London, Sr. Irene was ready for the next step in her “extraordinary adventure”. She began a new mission in a newly formed South Sudan, an area recovering from civil war and with great need. During her five years there she worked to establish the MMM Healing Centre, working collaboratively with other groups religious orders. Working in conflict-driven societies has been the most challenging experience for Sr. Irene, especially the feeling of living with uncertainty, instability and no ground under your feet.

However, life is not all about work! In her free time Sr. Irene enjoys swimming and music. She plays the guitar and reminisces on the joy it brought in the various countries where she worked.



Inspiration



Thank you, God, for my feet. With these feet I have walked in many places and among different peoples. My feet often went places where my heart and head were not yet ready to go and yet I found myself in a new place and You were there before me. As my feet move my body forward, please be their guide. Bring me to situations where I can show Your loving care.

Thank you, God for my feet.