



THE HEALING TOUCH

The Newsletter of the Medical Missionaries of Mary

'Rooted and founded in love'

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MMM Worldwide News

News from MMM Areas



IRELAND:

MMM held a Christmas Craft Fair in Drogheda on 26th November. The focus was on the crafts and the Beechgrove crochet group had been working very hard producing baby

clothes, hats, scarves etc. for weeks, while special sessions were held introducing people to craft making. On the actual day, the place was packed with people and business was brisk. Volunteers, both MMM

and employees, ran the stalls and there was a wonderful display of all kinds of things. Thank you to everyone who supported us. The day was so successful we hope to repeat it next year.

News from MMM Areas *(continued)*



MMM Sisters at the river bank where Mother Mary's canoe arrived from Calabar in 1921

NIGERIA:

In November, MMM sisters in Nigeria gathered in Anua to celebrate 100 years since Mother Mary Martin came up the river in a canoe as a young lay missionary. As well as a Mass of Thanksgiving and the 100th

birthday cake, they also planted trees and blessed a commemorative plaque.

TANZANIA:

In Ngaramtoni, the new Pharmacy School has just completed its

first academic year. They have 26 students now in the second year and 100 in the new intake. They have met all the Government requirements to be recognised as a training school and are delighted that both staff and students are so committed. Financial backing continues to be a challenge.

SOUTH SUDAN:

The Sisters send their greatest hope and wish for 2023 “that the PEACE AGREEMENT will finally be signed by both Government and Opposition, and elections will take place in the two coming years as planned and the country will at last stabilise and its citizens will live peacefully.



Revealing the Commoration Plaque *MMM Sisters at the Bridge in Anua*

Missionaries Amidst Insecurity



MMM Sisters, Fuka, Nigeria

Everything in life has a season and we are called to embrace all with love, wisdom and integrity. Niger State, since the beginning of the year 2021, has suffered grievous attacks from bandits. However, God's mercy and goodness has remained unsearchable.

Medical Missionaries of Mary Fuka community is in the Munya Local Government area in Niger state. The rainy season is here and despite the insecurity challenges, the farmers have been, and still are, working tirelessly in harvesting their crops.

Since the onset of this insecurity challenge in Fuka, our community and Primary Health Care has been on and off. April 2021 was our first experience of a banditry attack in Fuka and the environs. The community was thrown into turmoil and as a result, we closed for three months. Almost a year later, there came another attack which took place on 11th March, 2022. Thank God we had already come out of Fuka to the place where we had arranged accommodation for such occurrences. During this incident, the community was deserted; with families displaced and some people kidnapped. Some fled to neighbouring villages and others found refuge for days in nearby bush. Besides this, properties were destroyed and food crops and animals, especially cows, were taken away. People were killed and other lives were lost to hunger. Health conditions deteriorated and there was poor access to health care. Fear was very palpable, movement was restrained, so people were on the alert. There was no freedom of worship, and fear engulfed the area to the extent that the Easter Vigil was not celebrated.

Amidst all these challenges, God has been so faithful in enriching us with new insight, more courage and the zeal to continue his healing mission. To be a victim of a banditry attack is an experience that one should never



Members of the community in Fuka, Nigeria

wish for. It leaves one with sad and fearful memories but somehow one grows more in showing compassion and being in solidarity with others. It was a genuine moment where our faith and trust in God was challenged and we felt the protecting hand of God. This was our experience! Nevertheless, as a community we draw our strength from prayers and support from one another. We live each day as it comes, sharing our stories, strengths, and fears and engaging in community activities, not forgetting to celebrate. The renewal of vows of Sr. Linda happened at the heat of this time (April 2022) and we did not hesitate to celebrate!

In all these, we kept in touch with our Leaders and updated them of the happenings. They were very supportive and indeed the whole Congregation was in solidarity with us, praying and checking on us. Engaging with the Leaders, we expressed our desire to remain with the people rather than closing down completely. From the experience of the first attack, many patients suffered lack of health care services. In view of this, on 4th April (our MMM Foundation day), we initiated a mobile outreach in consultation with

Missionaries Amidst Insecurity *(continued)*



the Area Leadership Team. This was to reach out to our patients on special treatment such as those with sickle cell anaemia (SS), diabetes and tuberculosis (TB). Some of our staff expressed their willingness to participate in this venture. Presently, our outreach, which is in Kaffin Koro, has expanded with the inclusion of general health care with laboratory services, immunisation of children and a school health programme. The programme runs through Monday to Thursday. It has not been easy making such a journey daily on a rough road. Nevertheless, the fulfilment gained in reaching out to them is enough grace to cope with the stress. The nature of the work is demanding, yet the prayer and support of those around us gives us courage.



Immunisation, patients with Sickle cell anaemia

We are also grateful to our Bishop, His Lordship Dr. Martin Uzoukwu and his Auxiliary Luka Sylvester Gopep who have been very supportive. Some religious communities around us also have been good to us, paying us visits, not forgetting our parishioners who can't wait for us to go back to Fuka. In fact, our parish, Fuka, already sent delegates urging us to return, assuring us of an improved security situation at the moment. Some

of our sisters have been so brave to pay us visits; these were always reviving and encouraging moments for us. The patients have been so appreciative and pouring God's blessings on us for making the effort to reach out amidst the challenges.

They remain hopeful that we will soon resume in Fuka. We are blessed at this time to have a new diagnostic machine installed in our clinic, to aid in the diagnosis of tuberculosis. The training began in September 2022. Some of the staff that were available and some of the villagers participated and witnessed the installation. Indeed, it was a huge success! To them, it was a great sign that MMM PHC Fuka does not just belong to the Medical Missionaries of Mary, but they have a great share in it as beneficiaries. It also increased their hope that activities will resume soon.



Training on installation of the new diagnostic machine

Ugandan Girls



By Sr. Mary O'Malley, MMM

Let me tell you the story of the Karamojong girls from Uganda. These unfortunate young girls and children, some as young as 9 years old, were initially found by one of our Trainers sleeping 'rough' with no shelter and only plastic sheets in the Majengo Eastleigh area, Nairobi. They are recruited in large numbers by the Somali community and used mainly in domestic service and sexual exploitation, but they are also used in Al-Shabbab (terrorist) activities. We were reliably informed of Karamojong girls who obtained Kenyan passports to enter Somalia. They may get killed, but who cares?

We undertook the major challenge of rescuing these vulnerable young girls. Initially twenty of them were offered shelter in a rented house with food, personal and sanitary items supplied, plus bedding, clothing, etc. We hired security guards for night and daytime duty, also two house mothers to oversee their varied needs and we left them free to move out during the day and take any

small casual jobs they might find. It worked well. They went out happy, and at night availed of the security of the shelter.

The numbers increased dramatically every day until we had 98 girls in six houses. We also realised that at least ten of them would deliver babies in the next two months. It was a huge challenge. Many were sick, ranging from chest infections (two had tuberculosis), rashes, sexually transmitted infections, etc. In the first two weeks, we had taken sixty-five of them to various hospitals and clinics. That whole situation contributed to major expenses. Each morning we held daily briefing meetings. There was a strong bond and commitment in the team, and we consulted each other as and when necessary. Eventually, we were able to repatriate some of them, some to formal schooling, others received micro-finance assistance while those with babies opted to go home, and they too were given the rudiments of running a small business.



Update from Appalachia



Sr. Bernie Kenny, MMM has lived and served in the Appalachian region of USA for many years. She lives in Clinchco, a small rural town in the corner of Virginia, close to the border of Kentucky. For many years, Bernie, a nurse practitioner, and midwife, ran a rural health service using a health wagon to reach the farthest and poorest of communities in the coal mining district of the state.

More recently she has been involved in parish ministry and shared with us both the joys of belonging to a multi-ethnic community and the sorrows inflicted by climate change effects which hit her area during 2022, as follows:

“Our parish is composed of people from many nations. Fr. Eric Bafour Assomah is from Ghana and we have Indian Missionaries of Charity who care for special needs children, working individually with each child.

Last August, our communities were badly affected by floods. In a mountainous region like Appalachia, floods mean rushing water, devastation, and debris. Forty-four people died and 2,500 homes were destroyed. The Health Clinic in a nearby town, Isom, KY, was



Sr. Bernie Kenny, MMM

also destroyed. It received eight feet of mud and was inoperable from 28th July onwards. On 1st August, St. Mary's Health Wagon, initiated by MMM, crossed State lines, and donated for one year an older vehicle to serve as a temporary Clinic. I am delighted to know that it is open seven days a week, not just Monday to Friday. The debris from the hurricane is still very evident in the area.

Last week I visited the Clinic and saw many clients coming with a variety of ailments, influenza, respiratory viruses, and Covid being the most common. There are high levels of stress and anxiety. Many families, who lost homes and vehicles, are living with relatives which leads to its own problems.

The local grocery store has a sign which states “Hope to open in Spring 2023.”

That is my hope too!”



Sr. Bernie Kenny, MMM with parish group

Steps for Hope 2023



Steps for Hope returns in 2023 for its 2nd year. We will be taking Steps for Hope all during Lent and we would love you to be part of it with us. Participants are encouraged to set a Step total that challenges them but is comfortable enough to attain. We invite you to join us and walk, run or cycle - you can even swim if you want. If you are unable to participate, then we invite you to donate or sponsor one of our participants.



We are excited to welcome people from all over the world who will be taking Steps during Lent 2023. For more information and to sign up here is the link: <https://www.idonate.ie/event/stepsforhope2023>



Some of our MMM Sisters take “Steps for Hope” in 2022



Deirdre Lochaden, Sr. Sheila Campbell, MMM and Jolene Matthews at the launch of “Steps for Hope”

Meet the Sisters - Sr. Petronilla Irozuru



Sr. Petronilla Irozuru, MMM

First impressions of Petronilla are of a warm, outgoing, cheerful person. But she is also a woman of great depth and wisdom. Petronilla Nwanyieze Irozuru was born the eldest in her family of eight children. Her sense of responsibility and her reliability might stem from this position as eldest daughter. She grew up in a strong Catholic family where attending Mass and catechism class and the Rosary were part of the daily routine. Petronilla herself believes that this gave her a good foundation in the faith and the zeal to know God.

As a young woman, she was educated locally and then went off to train as a Nurse/Midwife in a State Hospital. She met MMM Sister Dr. Leonie McSweeney one day when Leonie came to her hospital to talk to the nurses about Natural Family Planning. “Umm”, she thought to herself, “This Sister is bringing her professional skills to serve God”.

She was attracted to the name of the Congregation, to its work and to the great simplicity of Sr. Leonie herself. Petronilla promptly applied to join MMM.

After her initial religious formation, she was assigned to the North of Nigeria – same country but totally different language and culture from her own. She found the people friendly and welcoming which helped the transition process a great deal. She learnt the importance of speaking the local language so that she could communicate more easily and work more effectively.

After Gussorro in the North, she was then assigned to Abujah, to coordinate MMM Primary Health care there. This was the first of other moves, each time growing in responsibility and teaching her

skills wherever she went. She has had training in Health Management, Planning and Policy in an English University, did upgrading in Nursing in Ireland, studied geriatric nursing, and cared for some of our elderly MMM Sisters. Generally, Petronilla is an all-rounder, reliable, energetic, and reliable. She is passionate about her work and a good listener.

In her free time, she enjoys singing and listening to music. She enjoys the quiet times before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel. “One thing life has taught me”, she says, “is that truly giving oneself in the service of others brings joy, satisfaction and fulfilment.”



Sr. Petronilla, MMM in Abakaliki

Prayer for the Earth



*For a just, habitable, and sustainable common home
Merciful God and Creator of all,
We praise You for the gift of the earth, home to so many forms of life
The common home of peoples, cultures, and species
We have made it an unjust place
where some consume and pollute more than others,
and the poorest face the greatest impacts of climate change.
Therefore, we ask You
to help us achieve climate and ecological justice
So that no one takes for themselves what belongs to all,
that we may share the world's goods equitably, and live simply
so that we may bear witness
that the earth is the sister and mother of all.
Help us to respect its rhythms of regeneration,
so that it may sustain all living beings
both in the present and for future generations.*

Amen

- Originally written in Spanish by Daniel Castellanos Velasco, religious brother of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit congregation.

**Thank you for your continued support.
We hold you in our prayers.
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