



In The Sacred Art of Listening, Kay Lindahl speaks about “Heart Listening.” She describes “Heart Listening” as the spiritual practice of listening from the heart and listening to the heart. Truly listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give another.

Dear Friends,

For Medical Missionaries of Mary, the rule of St. Benedict is the foundation for our life . . . our way of being a follower of Jesus and living the Gospel. Above all, St. Benedict valued **“listening.”** He encourages us to listen “with the ear of our heart.” We try. Sometimes we listen well. Sometimes we do not. But we do try. And because of listening well, of really hearing what was said, we have made many decisions over the years. Last year in the Easter newsletter, I spoke about listening as well. It does seem to be so important. How often do we say, “If only they would listen to me!” **We all long to be listened to and heard.**

In this newsletter, as we celebrate the new beginnings of Easter and Spring, I want to share how listening over time has led us to make decisions and open new missions and forms of healing ministry in both Nigeria and Brazil. We also celebrate the Final Profession of vows of Sr. Christine Natweta, MMM, who celebrated this wonderful day in her home parish in Uganda after **listening to God’s call** to life in MMM as her vocation.

As a Congregation we work with those people who are marginalized and often considered as unimportant or not valuable. They become our friends, co-workers, volunteers, and we know them and their families. In our work, we see the effects of injustice, a failure to respect the dignity of each person, and we often live in places where there is little freedom or sense of safety. So, this experience pushes us to engage with justice issues like anti-human trafficking, care for creation, care for migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people. Again, this is a **response to the listening** to the needs of these days in our world.

As always, we are grateful for each one of you . . . the extended family of MMM who share with us by your friendship, solidarity, prayer and financial support. Together we are **“listening”** to the needs of each other, our world and responding with full hearts in the ways we can.

Gratefully,



Sister Joanne

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM
Mission Development Director

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Spring
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Learning to Respect, Work With, and Live Among People Different Than Yourself

The Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (<https://cofpfoundation.org>) whose goal is to use dialogue to lead community driven social change, build mutual respect, prevent and resolve conflicts, promote good governance and enhance culture of peace, cooperation and development among adherents of different faiths and culture in collaboration with Medical Missionaries of Mary PHC clinic and maternity center in Abuja held a 2-day workshop and training on peaceful coexistence themed “*strengthening peaceful coexistence through enhancing the economic capacity of Sauka women.*” The event took place in Zhigbodo Sauka Village on January 16 and 17, 2023, and was convened by Sr. Dumka Michael, MMM. The people in this area are part of the Gbagi tribe, one of 271 tribal grouping that call Nigeria their home.

The purpose of the project target is to find ways to deal with the issue of hunger caused by the heightened incessant insecurity. The fear of going to the farm to harvest crops due to insecurity has increased food scarcity in the community. And



as stated by the Village Chief, hunger is unbearable in itself and it triggers quarreling and fighting among members of the village. The underlying issue is, of course, the violence and insecurity in Nigeria. Why are people afraid to work on their own farms?

From the interactions held with the women who are the backbone of the

Sr. Dumka Michael addressing workshop participants



The women attending the workshop

family, they would love to be financially stable to support their families hence the need for this project among the Zhigbodo Sauka Community as it will seek out alternative ways and skills required to better understand and respond to the complexity of insecurity that has led to a food shortage. The economic empowerment program was targeted to enhance the economic value and skills of the Sauka women to make a formidable impact in the community while also educating them on the role they play as peace enablers.

Twenty-three women were trained, empowered, and given materials to make products they could sell and use at home. The women were also educated on the importance of home management, basic business skills and personal hygiene. We learned that the community were fully aware of their importance and role in society even though they have little financial resources. They were all excited about the visit and hoped for a positive outcome, and they were equally eager and ready to learn new skills or innovations.

Medical Missionaries of Mary hope to maintain a continuous collaboration with the Zhigbodo people and encourage them in all their activities. They also seek to create more collaboration with other NGOs or institutions within and outside FCT-Abuja (Federal Capital Territory/like DC in the USA) that have the same common interest for a partnership that works toward a more peaceful society.

MMM in Brazil—an Extraordinary Adventure

“After a long process of research, listening, discernment, and prayer I’m happy to share the good news that on Tuesday, February 7, early in morning, our two Sisters Cleide Daniel da Silva, MMM, and Bernadette Fadegnon, MMM, will take off to the new mission in Alto Boa Vista, in the Prelature of Sao Felix do Araguaia. On Friday, February 11, the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, the bishop will offer Mass at the Parish and welcome the MMM Sisters to the Prelature. We are happy that this time has come and without your prayers and support this would not be possible.” The preceding message is from Sr. Maria Jose da Silva, MMM, our Area leader, on the eve of the departure. All the sisters and Associates in the MMM Area (USA and Brazil) gathered on ZOOM to bless them and send them on their way.

And Sister Bernadette Fadegnon, MMM, writes “And finally the awaited day arrived when two MMM women would set

out on a new adventure, a new mission in a distant place. The feeling of being sent became so vivid and so powerful when we had a sending forth Mass at our Parish in Salvador, and they recorded the many ways the Congregation had served and continues serving the needy people of the area. We also had a profound and symbolic sending forth prayer in our MMM community the evening before the traveling day where we were handed images of our Foundress, Marie Martin, and Our Lady of Aparecida the Patroness of Brazil, to go with us on the new adventure. All these moments prepared us to embrace the new adventure in faith and courage and feel supported.

It was indeed an extraordinary adventure. Sister Cleide Daniel da Silva, MMM, and I would spend a whole day and a whole night to arrive at our destination . . . three hours flight and 19 hours in the bus. It was, however a happy journey as we knew

very well that we have the support of not only our community in Brazil, but of the Area, the Congregation, our families and all people of good will and so we looked forward to arriving at the place enjoying the beautiful landscape along the way.

Upon our arrival, we were welcomed at the bus station by both our new Bishop and the Parish Priest. It was indeed a warm welcome, followed by a cup of tea where we narrated how the journey was. It has been a joyful moment since our arrival as the community prepared a huge celebration for us on the 11th where the bishop presided at a Liturgy to officially present us to the community followed by a big party.

According to the priest, they had agreed that each family would bring a snack or meal so that it was a community supper. There was food in abundance and leftovers after everyone had eaten. It was like Jesus with his disciples and the crowd in the desert. Since our arrival, we have been receiving the support of the wider community, inviting us for a meal in their houses now and again, offering us their gift and presence like the three wise people at the birth of Jesus. We are happy and we have the necessary support from the priest and all the people of God. And now, we look forward to the ways our healing charism will come alive here.” Pray for the Sisters and the people of Alto boa Vista as this new beginning unfolds.



Sr. Bernadette welcoming Sisters Maria Jose and Maria Gonzaga to our new mission



Receiving Hospitality in our new mission

Perpetual Profession of Vows of Sr. Christine Natweta, MMM

Sr. Otibhor Uwagbale, MMM, writes for us: “The sun gently let out its rays through the mist on the hills of Rubanda District, Uganda. Finally, it is dawn on February 18, 2023, for Sr. Christine Natweta, MMM. With all of God’s creation, we arose to this glorious day and gathered to give thanks to God for Sr. Christine as she made her perpetual vows into the Congregation of the Medical Missionaries of Mary.

“The Mass was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Abel Beinomugisha, the Vicar for the Religious in Kabale Diocese. He reminded all present that as missionaries we were called to share our faith with the people, and that it was the duty of our families and friends to keep us in their prayers.

“After the mass, there was a reception where guests were treated to beautiful dances and songs and a delicious meal. Of course, we were not allowed to end the day without joining

in the wonderfully energetic kikiga traditional dance of Sr. Christine’s people. On Sunday, we joined Sr. Christine and her family for a mass of thanksgiving in her village church where we were warmly welcomed. The ceremonies were simple but beautiful. The warm hospitality of the Bakigas was on full display. MMMs from all the countries in East Central Africa Area were represented. Since we did not have a community close by, the Consoler Sisters—an indigenous Ugandan group of Sisters, opened their hearts and home to us and accommodated us during our stay. For us MMMs, to whom hospitality is a core value, the graciousness of our hosts and the people of Kabirizi left a mark on us.

“For most of us coming from the flatlands, travelling through those majestic hills made our hearts flutter with wonder at the awesomeness of God in nature. We are grateful to Sr. Christine’s family who generously gave their daughter to God through MMM and ask Gods blessings on Sr. Christine as she continues to say her FIAT daily in MMM. We pray that the seeds of vocation sowed by our visit to Kabirizi will yield a plentiful harvest. Amen!”



Sr. Christine, her parents, and MMM



Sr. Christine with her parents



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In your community, welcome all who visit you as if they were Christ. Be especially attentive to the poor and strangers. Receive all with respect, simplicity, kindness, courtesy, and discretion. Pray for a humble and listening heart. Work with all people of good will. Join resources with them especially in the field of health so as to bring about a world of justice and peace. (MMM Constitutions 7.5, 9.10)

MMM Somerville
 Community

