



THE HEALING TOUCH

The Newsletter of the Medical Missionaries of Mary

MMM Worldwide News



Dear Friend of the MMM's,

Here in Ireland, we are in the middle of Summer and it has been a lively one so far. Since our last newsletter, I spent 15 days visiting our MMM Missions in Tanzania along with our Communications Coordinator, Nadia Ramoutar.

The spirit of "Karibuni" or welcome was strongly felt during our time there. I want to extend that joyful spirit to you as I welcome you to the July/August Newsletter.

Hospitality is a core value of the MMM and this Newsletter reflects that sense of welcome in many ways. We visit our mission projects around the world for updates, but are reminded in Brazil of the importance of the Visitation story in the bible. Mary rushed to her cousin, Elizabeth's side with no hesitation in her hour of need. In this newsletter, we share how many ways MMMs still show up, no questions asked, to serve women in their hour of need.

We also look at how summer is not happening at the same time in the world, nor does it mean the same thing to children. During our time in Tanzania we were overcome by the reality of how many children are hungry. It is difficult to witness the suffering of orphans and widows, yet we do what we can to empower them to feel God's love and the healing charism.

As editor of the Newsletter, I love to hear from our readers so please stay in touch with us.

With blessings,

Sr. Sheila Campbell, MMM



News from MMM Areas

Tanzania: Our Communication Department recently visited our Sisters and Staff in Tanzania and learnt some wonderful stories and took photographs. Look out for good things in the months ahead!

Ireland: In late May, Beechgrove Convent in Drogheda suffered a major power outage due to a broken cable. It cut off the water supply, silenced the phones and the Internet! Thankfully our wonderful staff were able to arrange a temporary "fix" within 48 hours and all is well. More serious repairs in the weeks ahead!

Students: It is the time of year when we celebrate the success of all our Sister students. In Ireland we had Sr. Henrietta Mgbeoma, Sr. Magdalene Upev and Sr. Elizabeth Ogar completing the BSc. Nursing Programme in University College, Cork.

MMM News Contd.

Sr. Gladys Dimaku at Limerick University is continuing her BSc Nursing studies. Sr. Laurinda Bundo and Sr. Stella Ovietaoba completed the Religious Formation Ministry Programme in Dublin.

USA: In spite of all the media news about the effects of the Canadian wildfires on the air quality on the East Coast of America, the good news is that our Sisters in Boston have escaped the pollution! The winds did not blow in their direction!



Sr. Elizabeth Ogar and Sr. Magdalena Upev, MMM

Seeing is Believing: Experiencing the MMM Missions First-hand

*Blog By Nadia Ramoutar, MMM
Communications Coordinator*

Since I began working for the MMMs over two years ago, I have read reports of the field work the MMMs were conducting in some of the most vulnerable communities in the world. At first, I read the reports with awe and at times sadness at the challenging conditions people were facing. The MMM Sisters base their work on the Visitation when Mary arrived to her older cousin Elizabeth in her hour of need when both women were pregnant. Without question or reservation, Mary rushed to her cousin's side.

Due to Covid 19 and travel restrictions, my visit to the MMM Sisters in the Missions was delayed. I continued to work with the Sisters remotely from our office in Ireland. We met on Zoom and the usual office communications of emails and Whatsapp. When I travelled to Tanzania along with Sr. Sheila Campbell recently, I was moved by witnessing the work of the MMM Sisters and their staff in the field for several reasons. It was a life-altering experience to witness their work.

I read the words "remote areas" in reports about where the MMM Sisters were providing services, but it is only after some time in a 4-wheel drive vehicle that you can really know just how remote, remote really is. Sr. Mariana in Arusha told me that they carry shovels and hoes for when they have to dig the vehicle out when the roads get impassable. The conditions of the road alone would be enough to deter many of us, but not the MMM Sisters. The rainy seasons can cause tremendous damage to the roads which are rarely paved. The conditions can become treacherous, but not enough to

delay the schedule of services.

The Sisters bring a clinic to the people who would otherwise not get medical care for themselves or their babies. The Sisters and staff spend hours making sure they have the medicines or vaccines they need to treat the people they will see that day. It is a sight to see all the huge suitcases piled high to make sure they can help people in their hour of need. I was also taken aback by the difficulty the Sisters face in just getting to the people they serve and they don't complain or fuss at all.

If anything, you can see the MMM Sisters and their staff come alive with the healing charism as they meet the people they travelled so far to treat or comfort. The MMM Sisters are helping people before their child is born, all the way through to end of life and palliative care. Some of our MMM Sisters like Sr. Marian Scena and Sr. Maria Borda have been in communities so long that they are now treating the children of mothers they helped in the past. This intergenerational caring of the MMMs creates tremendous trust and affection between the MMMs and their people.

It almost feels like a homecoming when the MMMs arrive in a remote community. Sr. Mariana Mushi and her staff in Arusha cover 16 remote locations with a mother and children clinic each month. As the Maasai women flock into one of the clinics there is much chatter and greeting. They are gathered at a remote clinic and welcomed. It is a homecoming, one woman welcoming another in her hour of need.

*Check out our latest MMM Blogs at:
www.mmmworldwide.org/mmm-blog/*

Hunger Amidst Insecurity



Working with Sauka Women in Nigeria

By Sr. Dumka Michael, MMM

The Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, in collaboration with The Medical Missionaries of Mary PHC clinic and maternity, Aco Estate, New Lugbe Airport Road, 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 of Kuje Area Council from the 16th to 17th of January 2023 and was convened by Sr. Dumka Michael, MMM.

The project target is to solve the issue of hunger being caused by the heightened incessant insecurity and this has in turn inhibited the crop harvested in the community. The fear of going to the farm due to insecurity has also increased food scarcity in the community. And as stated by the Village Chief, hunger is unbearable as it triggers quarrelling and fighting among members.

As women are the backbone of the family, they would love to be financially stable to support their families, hence the need for this project among the Zhigbodo Community. It will help seek out alternative ways and provide the skills required for a better understanding of the complexity of this problem.

The economic empowerment program was targeted to enhance the economic value and skills of the Sauka women to make their impact in the community formidable, while also educating them on the role they play as peace enablers.

The Project empowered 23 women (7 women with materials each to be able to make Ghana soap, liquid soap and izar; 3 women farmers for groundnut farming with 70 mudus of shelled groundnuts each; 1 woman with 20 mudus of soya-beans and other materials for making awara; 1 woman with 20 mudus of groundnuts and other materials for kuli-kuli (groundnut cake) making, 1 woman with a female goat, 9 women with materials each for the making of chin-chin and puff-puff and 1 woman with a sewing machine).



The project climaxed with the training of the women on how to use their empowerment materials to make various things such as puff-puff, chin-chin, izar, liquid soap, kuli-kuli, awara, and clothes etc for economic gain to solve their family needs. 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 roles in society not minding their financial status, 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.

The 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 that have the same common interest for partnership.

MMM Four Mile Hospital



Uses Funding to Save Lives and Make Major Improvements

By Sr. Charity Munonye

Located in Ebonyi State, southeast Nigeria, St. Patrick Hospital also known as Mile Four, was established in 1946 and managed by the MMM. It was founded to detect, treat and eradicate Hansen's disease also known as Leprosy. The Hospital serves severely low-income people with high levels of illiteracy. The area has also seen an increase in insurgency and many IDPs (internally displaced people) live amongst the community due to camps being attacked. The combination of poverty, illiteracy, political unrest and the remoteness of the area make health a life-challenging issue for the local children and adults who struggle with a complete lack of resources.

There is a maternity unit in the hospital that was established in 1966 and today includes 70 maternity beds, 32 Paediatric beds and 20 nursery cots. It is a specialist referral centre for many child and mother issues. There are also outreach services and mobile clinics run from the hospital providing a wide range of preventative, palliative care, education, health, hygiene and gender/safeguarding issues. The people in the area face major challenges to health and the services provided seek to help the people learn how to improve their quality of life on several different fronts that they would otherwise not experience.

Due to preventative health programmes and health services, the area is seeing outstanding improvements in many aspects of well-being. Our good news includes a major decrease in infant mortality rates. Improved equipment purchased with the funding of Misan Cara (MC) and the increase in community health training programmes means that people can be treated locally and not sent off to far distances. There have been many challenges in the hospital that are being overcome in a positive way due to the increase in funding and training. All of this allows us to create an increased quality of life in the community for school children, expectant and



new mothers through a wide variety of additional resources.

The Hospital recently underwent a review for funding that identified several major improvements on key markers for health in the community. This shows exciting progress. Now that we go to more schools, our networking with different school authorities is increasing and they appreciate our services. Our active collaboration with the Ministry of Health includes provision of vaccines, training, and monitoring of our services against set standards, retraining of our professional staff to cope with modern trends and data validation. Our staff training has empowered our employees to save more lives and to help more people in need.

Summer Time and Children



By Nadia Ramoutar, MMM Communications Coordinator

For many children in the Western World, having summer months off is an exciting time of freedom when they will enjoy fun activities, camps and even holidays overseas. It is a much welcomed break for children who worked hard all year at school and now can rest and enjoy their favourite activities, including video games, TVs, mobile phones and tablets. Parents can schedule time off from work and bring the school age children to different places.

For the children in many of our MMM school age projects in Africa and Brazil, taking time off from school is not the celebration it is in other parts of the world.

For one thing, many of the children in our programmes receive their main meal of the day in school, and sometimes it is the only meal of the day. It is hard for many of us, think how difficult learning must be for a child who has had no breakfast and will have no dinner. Many of the children walk long distances to get to school which means they are burning off calories that they did not consume.

The Faraja Centre in Singida, Tanzania run a school programme for vulnerable children. The children are entered into the programme through various types of referral. Some have HIV or are being raised by parents or grandparents with HIV. Some are children of chronically sick, terminally ill or deceased parents. The world is very harsh for these children.

The Principal of one of the schools, Juma J. Thomas is very grateful to the MMM's Vulnerable Children Project because it helps children who might otherwise stop coming to school for a variety of reasons, including not being able to afford uniforms or fees, also many vulnerable children are forced into work at a very early age. Some of the teenagers look very small for their age and at 17 years of age, some look like they are still in primary or elementary school due to malnutrition.



“There is no failing here”, the headmaster says expressing how much he cares about the 1,063 children in the secondary school. Despite his devoted attitude, he admits that the conditions for success are not there for many children who face enormous issues around poverty at home. He also faces a severe lack of resources at the school. He is both the chemistry teacher and the Headmaster because there is a shortage of teachers. He also has a shortage of books. There are only nine computers in the school for all 1,063 students, teachers and staff.

Despite the hardships in the school, the children are learning there and most importantly they are fed. Our MMM Programme in the school gives the children promise for a better future to break the intergenerational chains of poverty.

Womens' Empowerment



By Sr. Maria José, MMM

The Anna Sironi Centre is a pastoral work of the parish where the MMM Sisters live in Salvador, Brazil. Many Sisters have collaborated or led their activities over the years and recently Sr. Maria José, MMM, "listened in" to a conversation among three of the leaders of the Centre, Ana Castro, Maria Helena Ramos Belos and Ednalva de Jesus.

Ana Castro: What difference do you think our work here has made to the local women?

Ednalva: Definitely we have empowered these women in so many ways. I would begin with self-esteem. At home, many women do not have a voice. No one listens to them and yet they are the ones who carry the burden of raising the children – and get the blame if things turn out badly.

Helena: We have also helped in practical ways. As you say, often it falls to the woman to be the breadwinner of the family, but they have had little chance of education and no training or skills. When we teach dressmaking, cooking and literacy – all these allow the women to have a small income in their own right. It allows some women to escape situations of domestic violence.

Ednalva: What I love is seeing the women grow in self-confidence. When they come first, they are often very quiet and do not participate in group discussions, but as time goes on, they realize that many women are in similar situations as themselves and they begin to share more and explore opportunities for change. They begin to take a stand in our discussions and debates. They get involved in some activities in the parish and believe that they can change their life story through interaction with other women.

Ana Castro: Isn't it great to see these women becoming our new leaders? I notice how they can lead the discussions now, and I really love the way they are learning to share the joys and sufferings as we pray together before we start the sessions. I strongly believe in the healing presence of Christ when they can share joy and pain with each other.

Helena: I have also noticed how their health has improved. I suppose self-esteem encourages women to look after their health needs.



Ana Castro: What motivates me to do this work started more than 10 years ago when I retired. I came to help MMM at the Project Consolação. There the women came to share their losses and grief of losing a son through violence. In fact, I was helped by this experience. I confess that I became a different person, inserted in the current reality, and became more passionate in this work with women. That's why, even with the end of the Project, I still feel committed to these women.

Ednalva: For me, it is all about listening. I have learned with this work to develop my empathy and sensitivity to the suffering of each woman as they come to the center for the activities. I can offer my ear and presence for deep listening, and rely on my faith that God is always present. He does His work through me. I am trying to be a presence of love and compassion. Their stories mingle with my own.

Sr. Maria José: What have you learned from MMM over the years?

Ana Castro: I have learned to experience the Visitation like Mary and Elizabeth. This happens while I am visiting and know the joy of listening to people in their homes. I experience God's presence with the families. I am filled with gratitude for MMM, for the opportunity to learn to listen, share knowledge, be more present with the people of God, especially the poor.

Helena: In my interaction with MMM I was able to discover my abilities, skills and capabilities through the various opportunities offered to participate in training courses and meetings for the improvement of health care and listening. My faith was also strengthened. I also became more pastorally active. Sister Úrsula Cott, a special friend, invited me to participate in HIV/Aids Pastoral ministry and I am part of this pastoral ministry up to today, as coordinator here in the Archdiocese of São Salvador da Bahia.

Ednalva: Maria José, I just want to tell you how grateful we are to MMM. You have done a lot for us women here in Nordeste de Amaralina, our little part of the periphery of the city of Salvador. The Sisters have given me strength and helped me develop. Thank you for everything. May God bless you and enlighten your lives in your missionary journeys. May Mother Mary be a strong presence in the mission of each one of you. May she bring encouragement and nourishment to your missionary dreams every day.

Meet the Sisters - Sr. Chinenye Gertrude Imoh



Sr. Chinenye Gertrude Imoh, MMM

This month we are going to meet Sr. Chinenye Gertrude Imoh, from Nnarambia Ahiara Ahiazu Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria. She is a lively, outgoing person. She describes herself as “noisy” at times, but that side of her personality was not seen on her recent stay in Ireland! She comes from a family of eight children, two boys and six girls. Her parents are still alive. They were business people and ensured that all the children had a good education.

Chinenye trained as a nurse/midwife in the School of Nursing, Joint Hospital Mbano in Imo State, and in the school of Midwifery, Mater Misericordia, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, respectively. As she was discerning her vocation to religious life, she decided to work in Mile Four Hospital, Abakaliki, and see these MMM Sisters up close! She began with the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate (PVMI) and discontinued because she was not at home with the apostolate and then she went for studies.

It was our motto “Rooted and Founded in Love” that caught her attention,

and our healing charism. But she was undecided, and so for a time just pursued her studies and left all thoughts of religious life aside. Then, one day, she met an MMM Sister in her parish and took the plunge, asking this Sister who she should contact to join MMM. This happened when she was studying Botany at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike in Abia State in 2003. Her quest for serving God and humanity in the healing ministry made her quit the University for Nursing school in Mbano.

Her journey to MMM started back in 2007 when she visited the vocation directress, Sr. Fidelia Ogujawa, for the first time in Mile Four, Abakaliki. She entered postulancy in 2010. After her period of initial religious formation, she was assigned to Zaffe in the Republic of Benin in 2014. Apart from working as a nurse and midwife, she also was bursar and engaged in youth ministry. “It was quite challenging, trying to get them to reason with me on how to improve their lives. At one stage, I was frustrated, but my Sisters and a few of them encouraged me. The mission helped me to appreciate cultural diversity and respect individual cultures”, she says.

In 2021, Sr. Chinenye had the opportunity to upgrade her nursing to degree level in Cork, Ireland. In the Motherhouse we loved the visits from the students as they brought such joy with them!

Back in Nigeria in 2022, she assumed coordination of St. Theresa’s Clinic, Amukoko in Lagos. The clinic is quite a big one and highly demanding. Although they have 52 staff, there

is always a need for extra people to help. They deal with an average of 150 outpatients in a day. Her work is not only coordinating but also carrying out clinical work when they are short-staffed, and conducting health talks when groups invite her. Being in a slum area that is highly populated, apart from medical assistance, they also come to the clinic looking for food and financial help. Keeping professional staff is challenging, the medical officer who was there for only three years recently resigned and so did the radiographer. It will not be easy to replace them. The economy of the country has made medical personnel leave Nigeria for a better livelihood abroad.

However, the presence of MMMs in this Area gives her joy because many people in this area keep narrating how the clinic has helped them and they are appreciative. The patients so much believe in the sisters and the workers. “The cooperation between the staff and the sisters is highly recommendable, and this makes work a bit easier.”, Sr. Chinenye tells us.

Reflecting on her life, she has learned to let things be and trust more in God. “I can be impatient at times”, she whispers! Moreover, I am task-oriented, and I love working in a team to ensure the completion of tasks assigned to us. I value commitment, reliability, and integrity. I love dancing, reading, and watching movies on my leisure time.

Inspiration



“The more difficult things are, the more we must love, the more we must trust. Without God we can do nothing, but with God we can do all things.” (1954)

- Mother Mary Martin MMM

Thank you for your continued support.
We hold you in our prayers.
www.mmmworldwide.org