



***Compassion is not a virtue—it is a commitment.
It's not something we have or don't have.
It's something we choose to practice.***

(Brené Brown)

Dear Friends,

After so many years of writing to you, speaking with you, and keeping in touch in various ways, you would think Christmas would not bring surprises. But each year, Sister Kathie, and I, along with Connie are astonished, touched, and deeply moved by your response to us at the end of the year. The generosity, the kindness, lovely cards and greetings, and the trust in us as women of prayer . . . you share your deepest concerns and ask us to sit in silence and offer them to God . . . and we do each evening. Each year it is a new experience. A moment when the best of humanity lights up our world. Thank you on behalf of MMM's around the world who are the recipients of your generosity. You are certainly choosing to practice compassion.

In the world of MMM there is a lot happening. Each Christmas, every MMM community shares highlights of their year and we have been amazed at the resilience and compassion that was part of 2023. Thus, the theme of this letter . . . the practice of compassion. In this winter newsletter, the first of 2024, I will share with you, our friends, news from our missions in Torugbene and in Abuja, both of which are in Nigeria where Sr. Rose Mogun, a member of the Leadership team recently visited and shared with us these updates.

One of our young sisters, Sr. Ese Idogen, when assigned to Torugbene wrote:

I received my letter that evening after a special evening missioning prayer. I was filled with feelings of excitement and at the same time, anxiety. I was going to Torugbene? Alone? As I laid on my bed, I could hardly sleep. I thought of all the stories I have heard. I thought of the water, the life in the creeks, the isolation, the floods, and I remembered I heard someone say in amusement, "you will get to attend Mass only once in a month." I burst out laughing, it was a joke! Oh, so I thought!

Torugbene has been an adventure. Whenever I remember the burning eyes of the young men and women gathered at the different youth clubs organized by the sisters every week, wanting to learn more about themselves and their role in God's plan, I smile as I say to myself, mission is hope.

I thought of the babies who were often malnourished and dehydrated. I remember Ejiro (not her real name) who was really malnourished and could no longer walk. She was placed on a Nutrition program. Every day, I watched with eager eyes as she was fed. I wondered "will she ever be able to walk again?" With hope so frail, I prayed and watched, waiting for a miracle. After some weeks, there she was, making her first steps after a long time. I will hardly forget the joy I felt when I saw her move those tiny feet. Then I understood, mission is patience, it is hope. (Read more of Ese's adventures in her blog on the MMM website mmmworldwide.org.)

Both Torugbene and Abuja missions are deeply affected by climate change and violence. In 2024, so many of our realities are being influenced by those two elements of life now. As well in this newsletter, we would like to share with you how our mission funds received from you, our American friends, have been spent in 2023.

Finally, in 2024 your MMM Sisters and Associates in the USA and Brazil have committed to a program of reflection and prayer to transform our consciousness presented to us by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) . . . to learn how to navigate our world today with so much division, violence, and hateful speech. It is our way of trying to contribute to healing our broken world.

So, together we move into 2024 with hearts of compassion with a desire to be healers in our broken world. Thank you for journeying with us.

With deepest gratitude,



Sister Joanne

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM
Development Director

**St. Mary's Abbey,
Wrentham, MA, by
Sr. Kathie Shea, MMM**

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**Winter
Newsletter
2024**

Life in Creeks of Torugbene: “Water, Water, Everywhere”

Sr. Rose Mogun, a member of our Central Leadership Team, recently visited Torugbene, which is in the Catholic Diocese of Bomadi in Delta State of Nigeria. Rose explains that it is a village in the creeks of the Niger delta. Fishing is a great occupation here. The people do bits of farming wherever they can find a piece of land. During the rainy season, the roads are quite challenging with potholes filled with water that one stops to think of where to put the tires of the vehicle so as not to get stuck on the road or where to put one’s foot on plywood or jumping from one stepping stone to another used to navigate the muddy and slippery road or footpaths. Although the road (gravel, not asphalt) from Bomadi to Torugbene is completed, one can only drive to a primary school field and park your vehicle before trekking the rest of the way to your house. One essential commodity here are boots! The stranger needs a walking stick (or the hand of a resident) for support to navigate the roads. MMM is present in this area because there is no access to medical care for these villages.

There is one major road that runs through the market. Others are pathways to homes, private schools, and churches in Torugbene, which are not motorable. The people use tricycles and motor bikes where it is possible to do so. Otherwise, they trek. The Sisters have a boat funded by a donor agency and it is used for the outreach program to villages in the creeks. There is no electricity in Torugbene except a few scattered solar panels mounted by the government at some strategic points. The people who can afford it have small generators. The sisters’ house and clinic are surrounded by water with fish, tall grass, croaking frogs—especially at night, two churches, and mosquitoes! Living and ministering here is a great adventure in faith.

A section of the land on which our MMM house is built has been sand-filled and this enabled them to build what is known as a “monkey bridge” with plywood starting from the beginning of our house to the clinic. The sisters, staff, and the sick use this bridge to reach the clinic. I understand from one of the sisters that the monkey is skillful in its movement and hardly falls off from any height, so humans must be careful walking on it irrespective of how narrow it is. However, the bridge is wider these days because of visitors for whom it might their first time to walk on such creation.

The front of the clinic facing the major road from Bomadi to Torugbene is waterlogged with tall grass. This will be another important route to the clinic for clients from

neighboring villages, but it must be sand filled, a culvert built, and two pavements constructed to allow usage by pedestrians, motor bike, tricycles, and vehicles to access the clinic by neighboring villages. On one occasion, a very sick patient was brought in by canoe and they made their way through the water covered by grass.

The sisters provide prenatal care, outpatient diagnosis, and treatment in the clinic, and outreach to local villages. The six prevalent diseases in this area are malaria, typhoid, diarrhea, malnutrition, measles, and skin infections. There is a great need to do an aggressive campaign about immunization as they have lost people in the community to tuberculosis and other contagious but preventable diseases.

Other ministries include a program to give job skills to young people. Two women and three young men have benefited. One of the women worked with us as a case attendant before training to be a community health extension worker. She is back working with us. The second woman is in a catering school and the men did vocational training in electricity and carpentry and they are now gainfully employed.



Sr. Rose Mogun



Monkey bridge to clinic



Making your way to the clinic

Some of the challenges include the long distance from Torugbene to towns for businesses such as banking, purchasing of drugs, and visiting the nearest MMM community in Benin City. They need a four-wheel drive vehicle because of the bad roads. Teenage pregnancies and school dropout are challenges among the youth. It is difficult to get professional health personnel and staff to work in the creeks.

The economic situation of the country is affecting the people badly and they cannot afford their medical bills however small they are. The clinic is surrounded by water, and it is difficult for the patients to access the clinic. Vaccines cannot be stored at the clinic due to lack of electricity and insufficient sunlight to charge the solar batteries. The batteries are also in need of replacement. In all these difficulties we have found support with various funding agencies like the Conrad Hilton Fund for Sisters, Misesan Cara, and our American and Irish donors for which we are most grateful.

Life in Abuja: An Area of Great Instability

Abuja is the capital city of Nigeria. MMM live in ACO Estate which has grown exponentially since we arrived in . . . and the new area is now known as ACO Estate Phase 2. People from all over the country live here. There are five MMM Sisters in Abuja who are responsible for the clinical and public health work we are doing there.

MMM owns and manages a Primary Health Care and Maternity Clinic offering general outpatient (although some are admitted for 24-hour observation), ante-natal care/maternity, laboratory services; HIV and AIDS services; and outreach services to villages for immunization and minor treatments. Much of the services provided depend on the level of security as it is a very insecure part of the country.

Finally, there are services to internally displaced people (IDP) in camps having left their communities because of attacks by armed invaders. The picture of the place and the condition of the people living there is simply terrible. Families use plastic bags to make tents and demarcate where they live. The camp consists of people from two states of Nigeria. The sisters are engaged with one group totaling 1,764 people (264 households) of which they have been able to relocate 49 households. Twenty relocations were funded by MMM and 29 by Misesan Cara, an Irish funding agency, which is a collaborative effort of the Catholic Church and the Irish government. There is a renovated primary school in the premises for children. Part of the land where the people reside has been fenced off by the owner who is in



The IDP camp in Abuja where MMM is working

the process of developing that portion. One wonders where the people will move to temporarily before they are able to return to their original homes. Consequently, the work is ongoing with the remaining 215 households. We are sharing photos of the camps.

As well, the sisters are involved in poultry & fish farming, started last year to help sustain the work. There is a huge attempt to work with the youth who are so affected by the lack of security, lack of jobs, and a future for them. And finally, as Laudato Si Animators, we work with the local community and churches in the planting of trees to sustain life into the future . . . and to provide shade in an area that can be so, so hot. There are many challenges to life in Abuja, but the sisters want you to know they are grateful for all the support and encouragement they receive from MMM friends around the world.



St. Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, MA



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Your Generosity Has Generated Health and Healing in 2023

General Mission Funds in the amount of \$850,000 contributed in the USA were used in 2023 to fund resources for a cholera outbreak, "Stay in School" campaign, and the building of our OPD block destroyed by an earthquake in Kasina, Malawi; for project running costs of our new clinic in Uselu in Benin City Nigeria; for our Ngarantoni clinic outreach to local villages in Tanzania; building and upgrading maternity and staff quarters of St. Mary's Medical Hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria; building of staff housing for our clinic in Abuja, Nigeria; helping to build our healing center in Wau in South Sudan; women's development projects to ensure an income for women in both east and west Africa, education costs for our sister students in Brazil, and East Africa. "No need to be discouraged when you meet with obstacles. Recall the past: the beginning of the MMM adventure. Recall the words of Mother Mary Martin when all seemed impossible: "If God wants the work, God will show the way." Our MMM daily prayer!

Also in 2023, your gifts that you asked us to assign to specific missions or projects totaled \$529,000. How wonderful! Our accounts are reviewed each year by an auditor, and we would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. You just need to ask. We are so grateful to all of you.

and West Africa, and to keep our clinics running in both Eldoret and in the slum of Mukuru, Nairobi, both in Kenya. Also in 2023, your gifts that you asked us to assign to specific missions or projects totaled \$529,000. How wonderful! Our accounts are reviewed each year by an auditor, and we would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. You just need to ask. We are so grateful to all of you.