



***“Reflect on the signs of the times . . . (and) in faith and humility, respond to God with creative fidelity . . . in hope and love (we are ready to) walk paths that are new.”***

—MMM Constitutions (2015) 2:6

Dear friends,

It is so difficult to grasp that Spring has come! Where does the time go! As MMM now in the Spring of 2024 we are trying as I have quoted above . . . “to walk paths that are new.”

In the winter newsletter, I shared the story of two of our projects in Nigeria in West Africa with all their joys and struggles. Now in this spring newsletter, we move to another continent, and I will share news of our MMM life and ministry in Brazil in South America. The sisters in Brazil are very busy “Sowing Seeds of Hope and Joy” and the fruit is seen in the empowered lives of the women who live in such difficult circumstances. Our commitment to Brazil has continued for decades and we are blessed to have four wonderful Brazilian MMM Sisters. As well, one young woman has just moved into our community to discern a possible vocation to MMM. That is a gift!

We also can share that MMM is part of a collaboration in Drogheda, County Louth, Ireland, where our Motherhouse is located. Plans have been drawn up to build a hospice facility to serve the needs of County Louth. Hospice and palliative care, supporting the dignity of each person as their life comes to an end, is very much a part of our ministry in 2024 and we are delighted to be a part of this project in Ireland. Here in the United States, we continue to collaborate in efforts to bring awareness of the amount of human trafficking that occurs in our country through our membership in the *Alliance to End Human Trafficking*, and to curb the amount of gun violence through our membership in the coalition *Nuns Against Gun Violence* . . . all deeply connected to our charism of healing and making whole. We are also a member of UNANIMA, which seeks to keep the reality of justice in front of the delegates at the UN.

And, like many of you and your families, we are caregiving for our sisters, our mentors, our friends, and family members, those we have lived with, struggled with, and celebrated with over many years. Caregiving offers moments of great grace, of deep insight into God’s creative plan for all of us, but it is also difficult and calls forth our best. It is a form of healing that certainly moves toward fulfillment and wholeness and the example of Jesus is there for us to follow . . . each person is precious.

Finally, as I mentioned to you in earlier newsletters, we are part of a “Transformative Grace” process with sisters around the country trying to offer an alternative to violence and intolerance of the other. We are learning how to channel anger, disappointment, and frustration and use that energy in ways that support deep listening, openness, and commitment to justice. It is not an easy process in the United States these days, but we feel it is a call from our God to live out the Gospel.

You are integral to all these new beginnings, continuation of our ongoing ministries, and our efforts to be women of the Gospel. Thank you for walking the path with us. May this spring bring life to you and your families.

Gratefully,



*Sister Joanne*

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM  
Mission Development Director

**Spring Flowers by  
Sr. Kathie Shea, MMM**

**MEDICAL  
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**Spring  
Newsletter  
2024**

# Sowing Seeds of Hope and Joy in Brazil and the United States

## Salvador, Alto Boa Vista, and Somerville

It is with a great sense of joy and hope that the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Salvador, Bahia, rejoices with more than 100 women who were empowered with skills in the courses of cutting and sewing, catering, hairdressing, manicure and pedicure, arts and, and baking. These courses were offered last year in collaboration with the Parish Pastoral Center (Casa da Juventude Anna Sironi). MMM has been working in Salvador, Bahia, since 1989 and we have always focused on women and families living in very difficult neighborhoods.

MMM Salvador is working in collaboration with three women volunteers who are entrusted and committed to the daily management of Casa da Juventude Anna Sironi. In a society that tends to find more reasons to exclude those who are poor, vulnerable, and different, Casa da Juventude Anna Sironi offers a space where each woman feels accepted and loved as she is. It is a place where each woman rediscovers her inner wisdom and freedom to share her life experiences, to be creative, learn new skills, make supportive friendships, grow in self-confidence, and know that she is respected.



Our MMM Sisters in Salvador, Brazil



Sisters Cleide Daniel da Silva, Liana de Jesus, Marie Jose da Silva and Miranilza Nascimento dos Santos

Sr. Maria Jose da Silva, MMM, facilitated group therapy sessions. These sessions have created sacred grounds where the women have an experience of mutual trust and support. Appreciating this environment of mutual trust and unconditional love, the women shared their fears, aspirations, their pain, and desire for healing. They shared their experiences of God's healing love. These positive and affirming experiences encouraged the women to become committed to their healing process. Toward the end of the courses, most women expressed deep gratitude for having discovered their potential and having developed their sense of purpose and self-worth.

Several women who benefited from the catering course are already earning an income from the acquired skills. They prepare and sell snacks. From the cutting and sewing group, many women are making dresses for themselves and family members. All these achievements bring joy and encouragement to us and to the collaborators.

In addition to offering our skills and creating circles of healing with the women, MMM Salvador also contributes with financial support to the activities of the Casa da Juventude Anna Sironi. The funds are used to buy materials for the courses and to pay course instructors. We are grateful to our donors and the prayers from our MMM family. Let us continue sharing with joy and hope our healing charism that is helping women to heal and flourish.

Now we move north and west where in February 2023 the Medical Missionaries of Mary took the courageous decision to start a new mission in the Prelature of São Felix do Araguaia, Alto Boa Vista, Mato Grosso. This decision was made following a two-year process of research and discernment. Many of you reading this newsletter followed the discernment process with us. Alto Boa Vista is a local government of approximately 7,000 people and its population is formed by migrants from other states of Brazil and settlers of the big farms: Bordon and Suiá-Missú. Other parts of the town's population come from Posto da Mata, a small village of settlers who were forced to evacuate this land in 2013, for the Xavante indigenous tribe, whose land it is. The Prelature supported the indigenous to claim their own land while lobbying the government to give other land to the families who were evicted. The process of evacuating the land did not go well and ended up with the people being forced to move. This history is recent and the

wounds between the settlers, indigenous, and the prelature are not yet healed. It is into this situation that MMM has been invited to live and minister.

Hence, the population of Alto Boa Vista is largely defined by different groups: the migrants from the South and Southeast are the farmers who took huge portions of land for planting maize, beans, and soya; the migrants from the North and Northeast are the settlers who came to work in those farms; and finally there is the indigenous Xavantes tribe who are back on their reclaimed land.

The small town of Alto Boa Vista is in a development stage, there are some paved streets, and some are not yet done. Transport is an issue. While the local government provides school transport there is no public transport on a day-to-day basis. The parish is composed of the main church in the town and seven other outstations, which are located in rural area settlements. The settlements are 25km to 35km away from the town. Some outstations have a church while others celebrate the liturgy in their houses.

A few weeks after our arrival in March of 2023, just one year ago, Mother's day was on the way and as a Congregation whose charism is to care for mother and child, we could not let such event go unnoticed. We shared the idea of having a mother's therapy week with one of the parishioner who is also a social worker in the department of the secretary of health. She was very excited about the idea and shared the names of therapists who could be involved in this initiative. **Indeed, it was like the seed fell on fertile soil.** We had a couple of meetings to plan it. A form for registration of the mothers who might be interested was made available and in no time, the numbers of mothers needed for each therapy was reached. There were six types of therapy available for the mother's week. The Brazil health system legally recognized alternative and complementary medicine in 2006, so a lot of value is given to these forms of medicine.

The mother's week was a huge success and a good beginning for us. It happened in the parish compound at different points as organized by the team. The secretary of health was very supportive. All the materials used were catered for by the Department of the Health Secretary. There were professionals in other fields who were part of the team and offered therapy. There were six types of therapy offered: chiropody, reflexology, auriculotherapy, Bach Flower essence therapy, reiki, massage/ Shiatsu, and Tai Chi. In total, 40 people were part of the closing ceremony. That is how we began and now we continue to work in partnership with the health ministry and the municipal health department, promoting complementary and alternative therapies/holistic care. A new

beginning takes time, building relationships of trust, and assessing the needs, but we know we are where God wants MMM to be now in Brazil.

And finally, here in the USA, we celebrate the arrival of Sister Liana de Jesus, MMM, on January 29, 2024. As a Brazilian sister, she is assigned to the USA to be on mission with us here. She had the privilege to attend, with two other MMM sisters, the ordination of the first Brazilian Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Boston, Cristiano Guilherme Barro Barbosa, in a ceremony at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, on February 3, 2024. The new bishop was invited to celebrate his first mass by the pastor, Father Lino Gracia Ayala CS, in Saint Anthony of Padua Church here in Somerville on February 25, 2024, and four MMM sisters had the privilege to meet him. It was a good way for Liana to begin her pastoral role in this parish, which is home to a large migrant community from Brazil as well as central and south America. Welcome to the USA, Liana.



Sister Liana with Bishop Cristiano



The joy of empowerment



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Alto Boa Vista women's group

