



THE HEALING TOUCH

The Newsletter of the Medical Missionaries of Mary

Dear Friend of MMM,

We hope that you and your family are in the best of health.



Here in Ireland it is the height of summer now, the bees are buzzing and the days are very long as it stays bright until almost midnight. While much of the world faces darkness, we continue to strive to bring light to the world.

It is half way through the year, and we are busy around the world doing our best to make good things happen for people in severe need. This newsletter shares some of the everyday hardships women and children face in their remote communities. It is hard to read some of these stories without being moved. So many people struggle due to circumstances completely out of their hands. We do our best to empower people helping them get back on their feet for good.

A phrase from our MMM guiding principles is shared in one of the articles in this newsletter. “Wherever you are, whatever you do, let there be in your heart a space for others to be, so that unafraid, they may experience themselves as loved and so be healed” (MMM Constitutions 7.3). This is what guides us as we strive to meet people in their hour of need without question. Several examples of this will be shared here.

In the recent launch of a new coalition called “Safe Birth 4 All,’ our MMM Congregational leader Sr Ursula Sharpe made an important point that pity is the enemy of compassion. They are opposite experiences. We do not pity the very poor people with whom we work with, but we do everything we can to show them compassion. We show this compassion in our actions to make their lives better.

Thank you for your continued support and care that makes our compassion possible.

With blessings,

Sr. Sheila Campbell, MMM



MMM Worldwide News

News from MMM Areas

Ireland, Dublin: The SafeBirth4All Campaign was officially launched by Mrs. Sabina Higgins on Tuesday, 21st May 2024 at the Stephen’s Green Club in Dublin.

SafeBirth4All is promoted by a coalition of organisations including the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMMs), the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) and Geneva for Human Rights.

[Read More on page 2 >>](#)

Safe Birth 4 All Campaign Launch



SafeBirth4All is promoted by a coalition of organisations including the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMMs), the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) and Geneva for Human Rights. The newly launched campaign seeks to raise awareness of the wider issues of human rights and human dignity as it encompasses the realities of the experiences of women and girls who live with, or are at as risk of, obstetric fistula. It focuses on the reality that obstetric fistula is a preventable injury.



John Moffett, CEO of Misean Cara

The launch began with a powerful video highlighting the stories of two women in Uganda who have lived with obstetric fistula, one for some 50 years. The video was directed and produced by Dearbhla Glynn and Patrick Daly for Yoke Productions. Speakers at the launch included Mr. Ken Gibson, CEO of the Mission to End Leprosy who outlined some of the complexities and opportunities of developing and sustaining an eradication campaign. Sr. Ursula Sharpe, Congregational leader of the MMMs talked of the pioneering work in the field of gynaecology, obstetrics and surgery of the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Nigeria and Uganda through examples of the work of Sr. Drs. Anne Ward and Maura Lynch. Toni Pyke, PhD with AMRI, talked of the need for a SafeBirth4All campaign and Edward Flynn CSSp outlined how the “Safebirth4All campaign has at its heart, human rights, prevention and a holistic approach to reintegration and rehabilitation of women”. He outlined 5 key areas where the issue of obstetric fistula needs to be mainstreamed: education, diplomatic circles, advocacy opportunities, healthcare domains, communications and media. MC for the event was Nadia Ramoutar, PhD, Communications Coordinator with the MMMs.



Sr. Ursula Sharpe, Congregational Leader, MMM, speaks at the Safe Birth 4 All Launch



Mrs Sabina Higgins, speaks at the Safe Birth 4 All launch

The event was live-streamed on Facebook Live.



Toni Pyke, AMRI, Mrs Sabina Higgins & Sr. Brigid Corrigan, MMM



Edward Flynn, CSSP, Janice Kelly - MMM Staff, Nadia Ramoutar - MMM Staff, Mrs Sabina Higgins & Toni Pyke, AMRI

A Day Out In Lilongwe Outreach Program - Part Two

By Sr. Pauline Amulen, MMM,
Lilongwe, Malawi

We visit our patients twice every week. It is always an exciting moment for the homebased care team to go and deliver their services to those in most need who are unable to reach the health centre. In every visit we often plan to visit 5 to 6 clients in a day. I began the story last month with the first visit to Sarah and her grandmother.

The second visit was to “Agogo” which is grandmother. When we arrived in the compound, it was all quiet with the door closed, “Agogo” was inside alone, lying on a raggy mat in a dusty room in the dark. The family members had all gone to their daily work. A neighbor having seen us stranded came to open the door for us to go in to see her. She was very delighted to hear our voices. With limited energy in her body due to hunger, she struggles to talk, and she says, “The food you gave me the last time you came helped me to gain some energy, that is why I am able to sit up, but it is now finished, and I am very hungry.” For sure, there was no sign of any food in any corner of the house when we rolled our eyes around. Her daughter later came and found we were still around, so we encouraged her to come and pick some food items for her Mam in the clinic.

Thirdly we visited Anajere another “Agogo”. Agogo Anajere is in her 80s but she is getting weaker every day. When we arrived the caretaker helped her

to sit up so that we could chat with her. She really can't sit for a long time, but this day because she was enjoying our company she didn't want to lie down again. We were rubbing her dry back and she seemed to enjoy this so much. She has always promised us that one day she will sing for us. On this particular day she said she would love to sing but she could not remember the song. The carer started a familiar hymn and we all joined in a chorus singing and clapping hands. She was so delighted to sing and never wanted to stop singing. Agogo and her carers are always happy to see us around and are very thankful for our support to her and to them and the entire family.

Next, we visited Paul who is in his late 70s. He is battling a stroke. He was excited to see us arrive in the shade outside his house where he always sits. We had a chat with him, and he was happy to speak the little Kiswahili he remembers. We offered him massage on his arms, and we encouraged him to stand and move a little. He was so collaborative to do every exercise we asked him to do, and he promised us he would continue doing exercises daily. We also discovered that he stopped taking his blood pressure drugs a year ago because at that time he felt he



Sr Pauline and the homebased care staff

was fine. Without his medication his blood pressure has gone very high again. We encouraged the family to take him back to the hospital to be re assessed after which he should take the medication that he will be given daily without fail whether feeling better or not. We educated him on the implications of not taking his medication properly.

Finally, before we closed our day's work, it was afternoon in the scorching sun, yet we had one more patient to visit in the nearby village. This village could not be accessed by car. We put our feet down and walked to that village, a 20-minute walk. Unfortunately, on arrival at the house the neighbours told us that the condition of the patient was critical and he is admitted to a local clinic. Mr. Isaac suffers from both hypertension and is a diabetic. He had a stroke and also went blind. We hope we find him home and feeling better in our next visit to him next week.

Story from Kampala, Uganda

By Sr. Goretti Nalumaga, MMM

Margarida (not her real name) is 29 years old, married to 'Joseph'. Together they have four children, all boys and one adopted girl who is Margarida's niece. She grew up thinking that Margarida was her real mother. She is, in fact, a daughter of her younger sister who died in childbirth. The girl was told recently that Margarida was her aunt, and she was devastated.

Margarida's last born has severe cerebral palsy and he depends on her for everything. He gets sick often and is given more attention than the other children. He is accepted by his siblings. Her husband was very supportive regardless of his little income before he left the family. He was doing casual jobs which could not sustain his family. The small business he had was not promising. He then decided to go abroad for greener pasture. He was unlucky because while there, he suffered a motor accident, and he sustained a fracture. His friends who were working with him, agreed to treat, feed, and accommodate him on condition that he would pay them back when he got better.



He gradually got better after some years. He started riding a "boda boda" motorcycle as before, so as to earn an income, and pay back the debt. He also tried to support his family back home, but he tried this in vain. He is now jobless and stranded. When things became worse for the husband and she could not cater for all the five children in the city, she decided to take the three sons to their paternal



Continued: Story from Kampala, Uganda

grandparents who had nothing and the girl to her paternal relatives who also had nothing. All the children were no longer going to school and feeling unhappy that the mother sent them away from her. They are still young and could not understand the difficult situation the mother is going through.

To make things worse, the grandparents of the children always depended on their son for nearly everything, but he was no longer supporting them. Eventually, the mother went to visit the children and the condition did not please her, so she brought all the four children back since they were no longer studying and some were sick.

The sick child had stayed with her mother because no one would accept to stay with him. When the children came back, she used the money she was saving to take them to a school but could not pay all the school fees for the three terms. So, they missed half of the second term and only one is in school now as she is struggling with rent and many other domestic needs. Through advocacy, a Sister spoke to one of our friends who managed to pay school fees for the first born who is very intelligent. He is 10 years old, in primary three and loves school. He keeps on asking the mother why they cannot go back to school while their friends near them go. When the mother prepares food, the young ones ask for more because they are not satisfied; she gives them her food and she drinks water; she sleeps on an empty stomach. When she came to visit us first to share her problems, we noticed that she had lost a lot of weight. We gave her something to eat and to take home. She looked better when she came back for the second time. The sick boy gets sick often and he has gone to the hospital three times. He has severe cerebral palsy, and no one will stay with him. She was advised by some people to leave the child somewhere or do something but would not follow their evil advice. She now feels abandoned



by the family for not doing what they wanted her to do and some who could afford to support her, refused. They feel that it was her fault. When we saw how she was suffering, we decided to enrol her in the programme. Her son must be on daily medication which she cannot afford without support. We have provided nutrition and medical support. Income generating activity was going on as well, but she used some of the profit for domestic needs since the children came back to live with her. Unfortunately, the three children are no longer schooling apart from the one who was supported. The project which was providing medical support finished.

We remain grateful to our donor agencies who help us run the programme. Margarida has benefited from treatment and nutrition supplements for her child. We thank MMM leadership and all our generous friends. We are hopeful that through advocacy, we would get more help so that the remaining three children can go back to school, and the sick child continue to be treated monthly. May God bless and provide for all our needs always.

Empowering the Youth in Brazil

**By Sisters Nilza dos Santos
& Margaret Nakafu, MMM**



In Brazil, according to the National Youth Council created in 2005, young persons are those between 15-29 years. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics 2021 Report states that the Brazilian population is 214 million and the youth correspond to 23%, an equivalent to 47 million. The youth represent 1/3 of the economically active population. However, despite their high productivity, 27.1 million are unemployed. The alarming data reveals that a quarter of the youth neither study nor work. This leaves young people vulnerable and with increasing cases of anxiety and depression. They are also vulnerable to being recruited by gangs and using drugs.

It is in this context that the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Salvador initiated a project to accompany and empower young people. It helps them discover their potential and foster their wholistic growth. The project is being implemented in collaboration with the Carlos

Santana II College, a public college. The project team consists of two MMMs and a psychologist. They use a friendly methodology with the youth, listen and empower them. The aim of the project is to foster an integral development that awakens young people to rediscover their inner strength, have a sense of purpose in life and work towards their socio-economic, spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

“ the desire for healing is the first step to be healed ”

The project team members meet the youth, on a weekly basis, with different themes during the sessions. The sessions are a forum to express and share their challenges, fear and hopes. Here we share the story of ‘Iris’. Iris is aged 16 and lives with her mother and stepfather in the congested



Continued: Empowering the Youth in Brazil



neighbourhood of Nordeste de Amaralina. At the first meeting, Iris showed some resistance to the project's approach and activities. She entered the room apathetic, sad and her face was down. She did not want to participate in the group activities. In a simple guessing game that consisted of telling one truth and two lies about oneself, Iris revealed that her truth was "I want to die". Iris's statement raised a lot of concern from her classmates and the project team. "What would lead such a young person to think that the truth about herself is wishing to die"?

The psychologist said that "the desire for healing is the first step to be healed". And that's what Iris's story is all about. The project team, in network with the school headmaster, engaged Iris in a series of individual conversations to help her to access her perception and cognitive tools, bringing about a sense of purpose. It is very important to emphasize that the management of suicidal behaviours is addressed by both professional and systematic interventions. Therefore, she was referred to another psychologist who will have the tools and the time Iris needs. Having this support, she can go through a process of healing.

In the beginning, Iris resisted going to a psychologist, with the idea that she did not need a personalised accompaniment. "The group

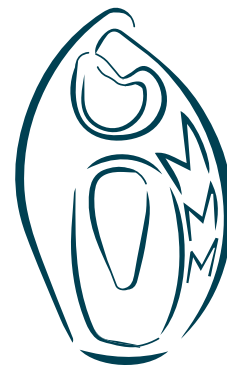
sessions alone will help me", she said. After much discernment, both with her and with her mother, Iris accepted to take this first step on the journey to her healing.

For some people with suicidal behaviour or thoughts, their primary desire is not death, but a different life. They seek any way to not feel the pain that consumes them. It was based on this that the case of the young Iris was handled. The project team uses a friendly approach that welcomes, listens, and accepts the young person as they are, using gentleness and compassion to offer them a space of trust in order for them to feel loved and supported and embrace the journey as they heal.

"Wherever you are, whatever you do, let there be in your heart a space for others to be, so that unafraid, they may experience themselves as loved and so be healed" (MMM Constitutions 7.3). Once Iris felt that she was heard, accepted and loved in gentleness and compassion, she started seeing other possibilities of dealing with her pain and suffering. We hope that Iris will persevere on this journey and discover herself as loved and unique in this world, someone capable of healing others, because she has been healed.



Meet the Sisters - Sr. Ruth Percival, MMM



Ruth comes from Derby, England – “the home of Rolls Royce and Royal Crown Derby China, from a county famed for its hills and dales”, as Ruth says rather mischievously. Ruth has a great sense of humour and can tell the tallest stories with a straight face, but this is her true story!

Ruth was born into a small, close-knit family. She had only one sister, Rosy, four years younger, but as a child still had all four grandparents nearby. Her family life centred around the Church. Her parents were individually members of the Knights of St Columba and the Catholic Women’s League.

One very important part of her family life was the experience of welcoming strangers. For example, in the late 1950s the first Nigerian men came to Derby to study on the Railway. They were Catholics, came to their church; they were the first

black people they had ever seen. Ruth’s parents invited them home and from then on they became friends up to her father’s death many years later.

At eighteen, Ruth discovered MMM by reading an old magazine dated twenty years earlier. She had been clearing out the attic and became so engrossed in what she was reading she sat down on the stairs to read, knowing instinctively she had found her life’s work. She had always wanted to be a nurse.

In MMM, Ruth trained as a nurse and midwife and then soon travelled to Tanzania where she spent over twenty years, both in hospital nursing and training a health team among the Maasai people.

After leaving Tanzania, Ruth had a short period of renewal and helped with Mission Awareness in the USA. This prepared her for her future work in England from 2001 onwards. As well as spreading news about MMM in England, she was also active

working with asylum seekers and refugees and started a new inter-church venture called The Solihull Welcome.

After our last house in England closed in 2021, Sr. Ruth came to live in Drogheda. As a passionate enthusiast of the care of the environment, she enjoys the garden and has created our own wildflower garden. Lobbying politicians on environmental issues is another hobby!

“One thing life has taught me”, says Sr. Ruth, “is that God has continuously blessed me with people to help me in all the difficult moments. They are not necessarily the ones I would have expected or hoped to help me.”



Inspiration

Sometimes in the stillness of the
quiet, if we listen, / We can hear
the whisper in the heart / Giving
strength to weakness, courage to
fear, hope to despair.

— *Howard Thurman,*
Meditations of the Heart



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

www.mmmworldwide.org