



THE HEALING TOUCH

The Newsletter of the Medical Missionaries of Mary

Dear Friend of MMM,

November really means the beginning of winter for us and the days are short and life seems to pick up pace as we rush towards Christmas.



As I write, our world seems to be heading from one disaster after another. There are wars, droughts, floods, forest fires as well as the widespread political unrest in many places.

This is the world where we are called to be channels of peace and healing. Mother Mary was very encouraging: "If God wants the work, God will show the way".

One of our stories this month comes from Sr. Helen McKenna in Tanzania. She reflects on forging new paths in the world of healing. New challenges call for new approaches. Two other stories come from Brazil – one from the North and the other from the South.

We are always grateful to all of you, our faithful readers. We ask you to pray with and for us and donate when you can. We cannot do this mission work without you, as our loyal and caring partners. This is the important part of being a missionary and being reminded that we are not alone. We have so much when we have the love and support of one another.

Our third annual Christmas Fair will be held in Drogheda on 23rd November. MMM Sisters and volunteers are already busy getting crafts ready for the fair. We hope those of you in the Drogheda area will come and enjoy the day.

With blessings,
Sr. Sheila Campbell, MMM



MMM Worldwide News

News from MMM Areas

Ireland: The 3rd Annual Christmas Craft Fair will be held in the MMM Auditorium, Drogheda on Saturday, November 23rd, starting at 10am. All are welcome! In 2026, we will change venues, but will continue!!

Nigeria: The civil unrest continues in this country but receives little media attention because of European and Middle Eastern conflicts. There is a constant fear of kidnapping and gang related violence.

Brazil: Intense forest fires are the reality for our Sisters living in Alto Boa Vista, in the state of Mato Grosso. Sr. Bernadette Fadegnon in an article in this Newsletter discussed the health and emotional problems that arise. Sr. Maria Jose gives a personal account from her home town in the state of Parana.

The World is On Fire!

Sr. Maria Jose da Silva, MMM



Smoke plumes in Jupira Colorado, Brazil

Sr. Maria Jose da Silva, MMM who comes from the south of Brazil in Parana State shares her personal experience of a visit home...

“I was in Parana in September this year and the smell of the smoke from the fires around the country was very strong and it affected many people who had their lungs affected. I visited one of the neighbours in my hometown. They shared with me how the fire came very close to their farm. This family used to have some cows to milk and depended on them for their survival. When they heard and noticed that one side of their farm was on fire, they got desperate.

The whole family is very active in the church and used to sell milk to many other families in the town. I heard from Vilma, that one day the farm was surrounded by the fire, and many other small farms got burned. Her own farm was prevented from being burnt; they believe by prayer. They started to pray and to entrust their property to God’s protection and our Mother Mary to care for their only means of living.

By the end of that day their farm didn’t get burnt and she attributed that to a miracle. She said to me. “It was God’s hands that protected us from fire.” It is amazing the faith of the people and

how much their trust is placed in God’s hand and Our Lady, Mother Mary, for their protection.

I believe that our planet needs people with that faith and commitment to life to protect our planet from dying and being destroyed from all kinds of damage. Our planet is crying loud for help and many creatures and nature are dying from lack of care. I am deeply convinced that if each one keeps trying to make a difference in caring for nature, life will last longer. Let’s join hands and start with small actions and care for the earth.”



Fires in Goiás, Brazil



We Can Do Something

By Sr. Dr. Marian Scena, MMM



A year ago, a 28-year-old high school teacher came to be admitted to our Faraja Hospice and Palliative Care Programme. His name is "James". Four years ago, James got a rash below his left eye which developed into a tumour. He did all the correct things: he went to a specialist hospital, had three different surgeries, received both chemotherapy and radiation treatment but the tumour kept coming back.

Now James is in the last stage of life with a grotesque cancer that has grossly disfigured his face and head! What could we do for him? First, we

listened to his story and how this disaster was affecting his life. He seemed at peace with his condition knowing that he had tried every available form of treatment. Thank God, James doesn't have pain, but it is difficult finding a comfortable position for sleeping. He is still able to eat soft food. His father is very sad but understands his son's condition, as did James' mother who was taking care of him day and night.

He is also cared for by his older brother who, it seemed to our palliative care team, was in a state of denial at the beginning. When I tried to

talk with the brother, he got very angry and kept saying that James was fine! James lives outside our catchment area, so we can't visit him at home like we usually do for our patients. But we keep frequent contact by phone with James and his father and brother take turns coming for medications and bandages. We are able to give them psycho-social support regularly.

With Hospice and Palliative Care in Africa we often are unable to do all that we would love to do for our patients because of distance and lack of resources. But we have a saying in palliative care that encourages us – We can't do EVERYTHING for the patient, but we can ALWAYS DO SOMETHING!

We will continue to journey with James for as long as he is alive. We continue to try and help his family come to terms with this terrible disease and will continue to accompany them when James leaves this earth. And this gives me hope – that we can ease the suffering of others!



Integrative Community Therapy – The Healing Power of the Heart

By Sr. Bernadette Fadegnon, MMM

The State in Mato Grosso, where we are located, sponsored a course in Integrative Community Therapy for the health workers in the state. Because of the partnership we have with the Secretary of Health of our district of Alto Boa Vista, this opportunity was made available for us. I am ever grateful for the learning I am going through.

What is this Integrative Community Therapy (ICT)?

It is a practice of a round table conversation created by Dr Adalberto Barreto, a Brazilian theologian, medical doctor, anthropologist, and psychiatrist who through his experience and observation, discovered that the reason why the majority of people go to see a doctor is not necessarily for physical illness treatment, but they just need to talk out their personal, family and work-related problems. And when they have the space to express what is bordering them, in the process they experience healing. He made the following hypothesis “when the mouth speaks, the body heals”.

ICT is the first and only therapy created by a Brazilian and is a

technique where issues that are preventing one’s life to be well lived and flourishing, are expressed by the individuals in the group through focusing on the emotions/feelings that are behind the issue. With the help of questions and sharing of experiences, strategies from the same group are shared to deal with the issues. It is a round-table conversation where everyone is equal and could share his/her joy, pain and experience of how to deal with the specific situation. It is a kind of round table conversation that values the wisdom and support of the people in the group.

It could be thematic or non-thematic round talk. Dr Adalberto conducts many round table talks. One of these past weeks, he conducted a thematic round table conversation based on the recent concern in Brazil and around the world. The burning of forests.

He started by acknowledging the ongoing forest fire that we are hearing, seeing, witnessing and feeling around us and within us. These fires affect our physical health, causing allergic attacks, rhinitis, sinusitis, asthma. It also affects our mental and emotional health, causing anxiety, fear and panic. Our air is polluted and our children and elderly people are



Integrative Community Therapy

having trouble breathing.

The strong wind and lack of rain facilitate the spread of the fires and the spread of ashes. These fires in turn destroy houses, burn forests, and kill animals of every kind and is a cause of despair.

The forests that are the lungs of the planet are in agony. The scenario is chaotic.

This forest fire damage is not limited to just the destruction of forests and air quality, but it affects our mental health.

Like a forest fire, the human person can witness outbursts of anger, panic attacks and depression. A short temper can lead to explosive and devastating attitudes. Strong emotions can cause emotional problems such as anguish, despair and helplessness. The

“when the mouth speaks, the body heals.”



Integrative Community Therapy

lack of love, blind passion, and anger can cause problems between us and those we love and live with.

In the same way that a fire can destroy the wealth of a forest, uncontrolled emotions can destroy friendships and prevent us from living peacefully as brothers and sisters.

Like the smoke of a burning bush can block the view of the horizon, so also our limited knowledge can lead us to preconceived ideas and stereotyping one another. This can prevent us from embracing people and realities as they are.

Just as breathing toxic smoke for a long time can lead us to serious health problems and even cause death, breathing in environments polluted with jealousy, distrust, betrayal, uncontrolled anger and despair, can lead us to lose the ability to distinguish between right and

wrong or between good and evil. Explosive emotions can intoxicate our conscience and environment.

An uncontrolled forest fire can remind us of our uncontrolled emotions and "Affective Fires" and alert us of the need to take care of our emotions and learn to control them through dialogue and peaceful conversations like round table conversation.

By learning to manage the intensity and nature of our feelings, we can avoid emotional devastation and foster healthier connections. And in combating the destructive fire of the aggressive impulse of hate, we can heal a wounded heart, console a desperate mother, and encourage children surviving family traumas.

It is important to seek emotional support during these difficult times around the world. Whether through friends, relatives and

family or through individual or group therapies.

We need to open the window of our hearts to welcome people. In the same way that the heart can explode, with anger, hurt, jealousy and despair and destroy us and the others around us, the heart is also capable of offering warmth, tenderness, acceptance, and thus building friendships and bonds.

It has been a learning experience, and we have begun the 'Roundtable Conversation Therapy' in the women's group in the parish and other parishes that have invited us. It is indeed true that when the mouth speaks, the body heals! It seems to be making a difference in the lives of the people."

Making New Paths

By Sr. Helen McKenna, MMM

“We go... where human need is greatest”.

(MMM Mission Statement)

Mother Mary, our foundress, prior to World War One, was a young lady of an Aristocratic family living in the suburbs of Dublin. Her daily activities would have included organising private garden parties, playing tennis etc. Domestic responsibilities would have been taken care of by housekeepers and maids.

It was only with the advent of the first world war that a wider and more disturbing world intruded into her life. Her brothers volunteered to join the army. Marie, as she was known then, chose to train and work as a VAD nurse. She was sent to Malta to care for injured soldiers. Marie chose to change the direction of her life to meet a need. She and the MMM that she founded, have continued to ‘change

direction’ to meet the needs of our times.

Marie was invited to Nigeria in 1922 expecting to work in a medical setting, only to find herself being asked to teach. She accepted that role but moved when it was appropriate back towards the medical ministry. Seeing the high rate of maternal and child mortality and morbidity while in Nigeria, she dreamed of forming a congregation, dedicated to the care of Mothers and Children.

Even after the congregation was founded and sisters began to work in Nigeria, another crisis needed attention; leprosy. So, in/near several of our hospitals, provision was made to take care of people with leprosy. In more recent years the

problem with VVF became the focus of our work in several countries; Nigeria, Angola and Uganda to name only a few. Education to prevent these horrendous human conditions has and still is a big part of MMM Ministry.

In my own time working in Tanzania, I have seen the need to change paths to respond to the ‘greatest need’. We opened a new mission in Nangwa in Mbulu Diocese in 1985. We received medicines on a monthly basis called ‘Essential Drugs’. Within a short time, people from far beyond our catchment area made their way to our Dispensary and Outreach Centres. This led to a shortage of medicines before the end of the month. We had to look for alternatives to fill the gap. We turned to Reflexology using a book on the topic. Over time, I got an opportunity to take a full year’s diploma course to qualify as a Reflexologist and use it to this day, specialising in Hand Reflexology.

While serving the local community in Nangwa Tanzania, HIV/Aids appeared around 1990. Our dream had been to move further ‘into the bush’ to provide medical care for neglected and often despised Barabaig people. When Aids reared its head, we discerned and decided



Nangwa Community in the 1990s: Srs. Helen McKenna, Sr. Carmel Cooke, Sr. Mary Friel & Sr. Vincent Pallotti Sarwat, MMM

Continued: Making New Paths

the most urgent need was to set up an intense education program to prevent HIV infection. We also set up a counselling program for couples who tested positive for Sexually Transmitted Diseases, a forerunner to Aids. We were also funded by SCIAF (The Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund). With their funds we developed a diocesan-wide program in each Dispensary in the diocese of Mbulu.

In the 90's, following the decision of the Tanzanian Government to join the International Monetary Fund (IMF), food started coming in from Europe. I remember the first time Coca Cola, white bread and even bacon and sausages appeared in the shops. At first we were excited to see food from home but before long, it was clear that this European food was not better than the available food in Tanzania.

I took time to learn the advantages of good local food and even more so how the food was processed. Dehusking cereal became possible when milling with machines was introduced. This meant that the best part of the cereal was removed and fed to livestock. Again, I changed my manner of working and started teaching various groups on Nutrition. It was challenging to convince some people that their own



Sr. Helen McKenna and patient, Nangwa Health Centre

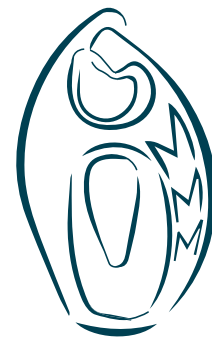


Clinic and mill at Nangwa Community

food was actually superior quality to the new European novelty food. I continue to focus on this important aspect of Nutritional Education knowing that it would have long-term consequences for the people.

In summary, I would say that in MMM, we don't follow the paths but we make new paths. We change and adapt our ministry in order to 'go ... where human need is greatest'.

Meet the Sisters - Sr. Rosemary Akpa, MMM



Sr. Rosemary Akpa, MMM

Sr. Rosemary is from Amata, Mgbowo in Awgu, Enugu State, Nigeria. She is a small bundle of fun! On first impression she is just someone who is brimming over with energy and enjoying her life and work.

She comes from a family of six children, three boys and three girls. She is the fourth in line. At present all her siblings are alive and well but both her parents are now deceased.

Rosemary always wanted to be a religious Sister. Her family were all devoted Catholics, and she grew up joining many church groups. She took the decision to enter religious life, but her older sister persuaded

her to do Accountancy first. Perhaps the sister wanted her to have a back-up plan. Rosemary says she was also interested in quantity surveying at this time. So, Rosemary studied for her Diploma in Accountancy and had her work experience in a bank.

Again, it was family influence that led her to MMM. She told one of her cousins about wanting to join religious life. He encouraged her to join MMM, telling her that there is where she will be happy. He narrated how he visited MMM and how they showed him hospitality. They were joyful and would not misunderstand her sense of humour!

Since joining MMM, Sr. Rosemary has done more professional studies in Accountancy and has been involved in hospital and clinic administration ever since. She has worked in Angola for over ten years, the Republic of Benin for three years, and in many hospitals and clinics in Nigeria – Abakaliki, Urua Akpan, Fuka, Abuja. She is presently working in the Family Life Centre VVF Hospital, Itam,

as the Hospital Administrator since 2020.

Sr. Rosemary enjoys life! She enjoys her community and missionary life and working with and for other people is life-giving. In her spare time, she enjoys needle work, listening to music and singing, praying/meditating on the scriptures and nature, dancing, reading, and admiring nature through plants and animals.

Sr. Rosemary is a joyful, happy person in each community where she has lived. It is always a pleasure to be around her.

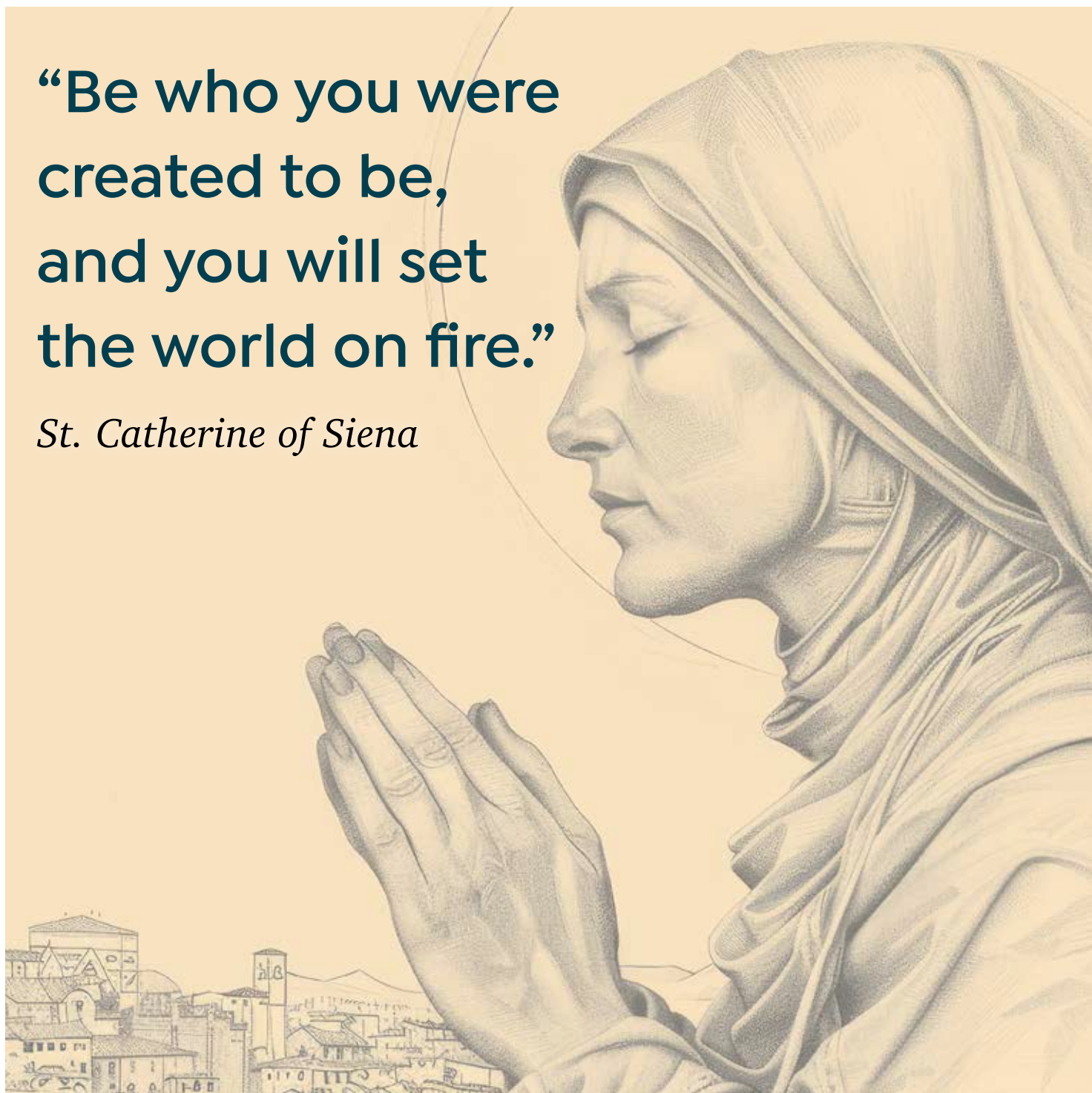
Life has taught her two things:

1. There are a lot of good things in stock for everyone.
2. All we need is patience, what doesn't happen today must surely happen tomorrow, as long as there is life.

Inspiration

“Be who you were
created to be,
and you will set
the world on fire.”

St. Catherine of Siena



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

www.mmmworldwide.org