



MEDICAL MISSIONARIES OF MARY

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Winter
Newsletter
2025

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first Step.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

***“Our human hearts plan out our ways, but it is our
God who makes our steps secure.”***

Proverbs 16:9

Dear Friends,

A new year begins, and we take the first step . . . and as the quotes above encourage, we trust the next step will follow! As men and women of faith, we do trust the year 2025 will unfold and we will be given what we need to embrace and live it well each step of the way.

This is my 10th year of writing to you, preparing newsletters, and ensuring your gifts are processed and acknowledged. You would think I would be accustomed to Christmas, but yet each year I am amazed and filled with joy that you think of us so faithfully and even surprise us with your gifts and support. For a Congregation like MMM who work in very difficult and poor parts of our world, this means so much to us. Thank you.

As we begin the year, we are moving from one donor software company to another as the one we have used for 22 years is coming to an end. It is quite a challenge to move so much information, and we will do our best, but there may be mistakes and we ask for your patience. This newsletter will go out to all of you, and I ask you to let us know if you are not happy to receive four newsletters each year and a Christmas card or if you would prefer just one mailing. We feel the newsletters are our responsibility to update you on the work of the Congregation. For some, the website is another way to keep up with MMM’s work and news. Unless we hear differently from you, you will receive five mailings each year, but no more. And we do apologize in advance as we are remiss in sending some acknowledgements in the next few weeks as we make this transition.

In this newsletter, we will honor the lives of three American MMMs who have died very recently and share news of our new school for Pharmacy Studies in Tanzania. It is also 75 years since MMM arrived in the USA . . . that leap of faith we took in 1950, our initial home on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, then 1 Arlington Street in Winchester, then Chicago, City Island in the Bronx, San Ysidro in California, Brighton, Somerville, and Malden in Massachusetts, and now back to origins here in Somerville in the Boston area, which is now the home of MMM life in the USA. So many changes, so many steps, and so much good has been done along the way. Some of you have been with us through many years of this journey, others are newer, but what we hold in common is a desire to bring healing to our world. And so, we take the next steps into 2025!

Gratefully,



Sister Joanne

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM
Mission Development Director

In Memoriam

We can only summarize for you here the lives of three wonderful MMM women who died in 2024 here in the USA. Scan the QR code on left to view their complete obituaries. Together they tell the story of a deep commitment to healing and fidelity to our vocation to be “*women on fire with the healing love of God.*” (MMM Constitutions)



Sr. Mary Ellen Sambuco, MMM, died peacefully on September 28, 2024, in the early morning hours at Sancta Maria Nursing Facility in Cambridge. She was born in Los Angeles but grew up and had all her early education in Irwin, PA. After leaving school she studied for Licensed Practical Nursing, graduating in 1965. She worked for three years in pediatrics and obstetrical nursing on a Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota where she developed an appreciation and love for indigenous American Indian culture and spirituality that was a part of her throughout her life. It was there she met the Benedictine Sisters, and it was their mentoring and friendship that helped her find her way to MMM in Winchester, MA, in 1968.

After her initial religious formation, she went to Northeastern University and graduated as a registered nurse. She then went to Ireland and England for the Midwifery training and British registration she would need for her future work in Malawi. Sr. Mary Ellen went to Malawi in 1978 and began work in St. John’s Hospital in Mzuzu. She also worked in both Nkhata Bay and in Chipini. She worked in maternal and child health, and she had special skills and a gift in caring for premature babies.

In 1992 she returned to the USA. Her ministry during the following years was divided between assignments of maternal health and childcare, visiting families and community nursing, and she had a special gift for working with children with special needs. Growing up she had one younger brother, Sonny, who had Down’s Syndrome. He was a beautiful soul and gave her a special love for all those with special needs. He was there to welcome her home when she died.



Sr. Sheila Berthiaume, MMM, was born in Canada, but the family moved to the USA when she was a baby and made their home in Detroit, MI. Sheila entered MMM at the age of eighteen. Already drawn toward the healing profession, she went on to study medicine in Ireland at University College, Dublin, and gained all her postgraduate training at the International Missionary Training Hospital (now Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital) in Drogheda. Sr. Sheila was a qualified surgeon, FRCS Edinburgh Scotland, with experience in both pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology.

Her assignment to East Africa began in 1970. Most of her work was in Tanzania, in both Makiungu and Dareda Hospitals, but she also had brief periods of relief work in Uganda.

Sr. Sheila was noted for her gentleness and kindness. She loved music and celebrated every holiday with beautiful decorations, which she treasured from year to year. She was also very fond of flowers and plants and had a special affection for turtles! Her love of music continued right up to the end of her life, taking joy tapping her feet and keeping time to the music.

Sheila died on October 12, 2024, at Mary Immaculate Restorative Center in Lawrence, MA.



Sister Bernadette (Bernie) Kenny, MMM, was born in Boston, MA, and baptized Mary Ellen. Her early schooling was in Somerville, MA, coincidentally where MMM came to live later. After leaving school she worked as a dental assistant before joining MMM in Winchester, MA.

After her initial religious formation period, she went to Ireland to study nursing. After completing her nurse and midwife training, she traveled to Tanzania where her first mission was in Dareda Hospital. After a short break to upgrade her nursing to degree level in Boston, she was then assigned to Ethiopia working in Gambo. In 1978 she was reassigned to Appalachia where she found her life's work.

MMM went to the Appalachian Mountains at the request of the Richmond Catholic Diocese. Sr. Bernie started the program by dispensing health care and

a kind touch out of her Volkswagen Beetle. In 1980, the Health Wagon was officially formed with partner and sponsor, St. Mary's Hospital in Norton, VA, which provided valuable support for over 25 years. In 1983, Sr. Bernie upgraded her skills at the Medical College of Virginia becoming a Registered Family Nurse Practitioner. Although Sr. Bernie turned over the leadership of the Health Wagon in December 2005, her heart and life remained firmly embedded in Appalachia until she died.

Sister Bernie initiated the invitation to the Remote Area Medical project (RAM) coming to the region, an annual three-day open air medical clinic drawing people from the surrounding counties. She also co-authored *Better for Being with You* with Tauna Gulley, a nursing instructor for the University of Virginia in Wise, VA, that explores the concept of care and caring among residents in central Appalachia.

Bernie died on December 7, 2024, still in Appalachia among the people she loved.

MMM School of Pharmaceutical Sciences (MMM-SPS) Offer Opportunities for Study

The MMM-SPS in collaboration with partners Ochlyski Family Foundation (USA), an Anonymous donor (Ireland), and a Congregation of Sisters in England are supporting two young individuals with albinism and five marginalized young Maasai women with training in pharmaceutical studies at the Diploma level. This is a response to the MMM option to provide opportunity for those who live in poverty.

In Tanzania, people with albinism face discrimination and unjust treatment, being thought of "a curse from God," and in many places they are not even considered to be human beings. Maasai women are marginalized with few completing secondary education and none with access to higher education because of forced marriages. As a result, the majority remain voiceless and unable to demand social human rights, including education. Many Maasai women live in poverty and in a social-economic status of life that is intimidating and unacceptable.

The need for professional education among these two groups is great in our catchment area (Arusha and

Manyara regions). The school would like to increase their numbers, and we are delighted to receive support for their education. In this way we also fulfill the MMM-SPS main goal of contributing to the health system by strengthening safe drug administration within our catchment area.

The school also helps students from humble families who struggle to pay school fees because of unforeseen circumstances. We witnessed this in 2023 when one of our students lost his father (the family breadwinner) and was no longer able to pay his fees. He searched many months for financial sponsorship but was unsuccessful. Practicing MMM's spirit that is "*option for the poor*," the school's management stepped in assisting with the school fees and allowing this young Massai man to continue his education.

It is through the help of each of you reading this newsletter that we are able to ensure these young men and women continue their studies . . . a blessing for them and for the health care system in Tanzania. Thank you!



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BEQUESTS: Gifts That Keep on Giving

Your bequest will ensure that those you love and the institutions you care about receive a portion of your estate when you are gone. Please consider the MMMs as you prepare your will. If you already have a will, contact your attorney about adding a codicil (amendment). The Medical Missionaries of Mary, Inc. (legal name) is a tax exempt entity in accordance with section 501(c) (3) of the IRS code.

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