

MEDICAL MISSION NEWS

Winter 2010



MMS in east Africa

Society Coordinators German MMS Agnes and Indian MMS Elizabeth visited MMS in East Africa in June/July 2010. This is an adaptation of their report.

“New thought – new action – how simple it sounds and how difficult it is! When crisis threatens, it is all too easy to go on acting – or reacting – as we did before. But great rewards await men and women who can change the pattern of their thinking to meet new conditions or new challenges.”

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. We must think anew and act anew.”

These words are part of our Founder Anna Dengel's personal notes from 1968. She used them for her own encouragement to move on in times of transition in order to remain relevant in changing circumstances. District East Africa is in a major transition time: Most sisters from other continents have repatriated to their districts of origin. The process of letting go and owning the full responsibility for the present and the future takes time as it entails a process of transition.

The first generation of MMS from other parts of the world who were missioned to Africa are no longer responsible for the sustainability of MMS life and mission in East Africa. Now African MMS are the only ones who can take full responsibility for the present and future development. That is a big challenge demanding a lot of energy from everyone. We have to answer important questions. Who are we as MMS in District East Africa? What are the values for which we want to live as MMS in Africa? We know that the questions and issues of this transition time are part of the reality of the Church in Africa today.

On the 23rd June we landed in Entebbe, Uganda. Three Uganda sisters: Therese Tindirugamu, Speciosa Babikinamu and Immaculate (a pre-candidate) welcomed us with “Karibu (Welcome)” saying “Guests are a blessing for us!” and “God gave us rain today, so the earth will bear fruit.” There was a downpour and as we were waiting for the rain to stop, all of a sudden we noticed a big bright rainbow shining from one end to the other across the dark rainy clouds, significant for our future in Africa!

MMS in Uganda

The Ugandan Sector Africa Coordinator, a Ugandan counsellor and psychotherapist and a second year candidate make up the community in Bukoto, An American MMS works in a hospital, lives on its compound but relates to the Bukoto community. They invite interested women for weekends to get to know MMS life and mission. Elizabeth spent time with all the sisters to talk about the issues of importance to their area today.



Elizabeth visits a Rubanda Family

Rubanda, in the southwest of Uganda is close to the Rwandan and Congolese borders. A health center was started in 1988 by Medical Mission Sisters at the request of the local bishop, serving about 58,000 people within a radius of 10 to 15 miles. The main activities of the centre are maternal and child health with an outreach programs which also includes nutrition clinics, HIV/AIDs programs, safe motherhood and anti-malarial programs. A major shift was forced on them when three sisters moved from Rubanda. Kenyan MMS Bernadette Narotso who took over as administrator was alone for few months before being joined by two others, a Ugandan and a Malawian. Now people are again sure that MMS will continue their healing presence.

MMS in Kenya

Most MMS in Nairobi are in hospitals or health institutions in different places. One works with the Major Religious organisation and one is our district treasurer while one continues studies in social work. Kenyan MMS Rosemary Adhiambo Oyusu coordinates the program for the candidates from all parts of Africa exploring joining us. There are three community houses in Kenya and some sisters living alone who relate to one of them. A Kenyan MMS and an American MMS are living far from Nairobi but relate with one of the ocmunities. They are now phasing out their work among the Masai. The district will look again into the needs for housing, especially when more sisters are living alone.

The clinic in Ang'iya (Western Kenya) remains a major project with three MMS involved. After the pioneering phase of four years, MMS in Ang'iya are well known and appreciated. They have gained the trust of the people in that local area and in the diocese. This became evident at the celebration of the blessing of the new house in Ang'iya. The celebration was one of the highlights of our visit.



Cutting the cake, a model of the new house



Celebration of blessing of the new house

Together with the people from the neighbourhood, and the Diocese, we gave thanks for the healing mission of our sisters in that very deprived area where a lot of people especially women are affected by HIV/AIDS and poverty. In spite of their suffering, we experienced the joy and deep love within all and their willingness to share all they have. Our sisters received gifts ranging from goats, sheep, chickens, eggs, vegetables, and fruit to the “last coin of so many widows”. The singing and dancing of both young and old witnessed that their access to the divine source of life is a resource that will never be destroyed not even by poverty, injustice or any kind of sickness, violence or death.

We were impressed by the many young women in different phases of formation and integration who are interested in joining MMS and are signs of new life. In 2011 they expect a total of 10 women in the candidacy phase. Nearly all communities are involved in integrating young women as part of MMS-life. This needs time and energy and also a good background of accompanying human and spiritual growth processes. District East Africa has wonderful women who are committed to live this mission. They take the challenge to integrate the women and at the same time to integrate themselves into the life of the next generations. They want to intensify their collaboration and to support each other with their gifts across Uganda and Kenya. We were very happy to experience the power and vitality of our young sisters, their deep commitment to grow into MMS-life and to integrate the values into their own lives.

All the MMS of East Africa met together for the best part of three days to work towards a renewal that will help to shape our God-given call and mission and their unique contribution to MMS worldwide. We experienced a deep commitment and love for our common call. We celebrated life and togetherness as MMS in spending quality time with each other, reflecting and sharing, letting ourselves being moved by rituals and each other's stories.

The time together was a move forward on the journey into healing, forgiveness and reconciliation embedded in the prophetic call of the Church in Africa today and the healing charism of our Society. The African Synod named 'Own your responsibility for whatever you want to happen' as one important prophetic challenge of the Church in Africa. The Synod recommended the use of resources in Africa rather than depending on others in difficult situations. It is a hard challenge for every person everywhere to reconcile herself with her own giftedness especially when faced with the reality of less education and family-backgrounds and upbringing that lead to feelings of inferiority. The reality is that study and certificates, prestige jobs or any status do not contribute to the dignity of anyone. This is a challenge for the whole Society to review each one's attitudes, values and criteria that lead to judgements and exclusivity, and to discover God's creativity and love in calling MMS in Kenya and Uganda. They will take up their unique place alongside MMS worldwide, differently but competently, and that will include reconciliation with the history of being colonized.

Members of District East Africa are coming from five different nations and from many different cultures and tribal backgrounds. All communities are multicultural and multi-ethnic. They are living across tribal lines and can be instrumental in tackling this intricate subject. It is an opportunity to address family and tribal issues for the good of the whole Society and indeed for the whole Church and to look at how tribal conflicts affect community living.

The members worked hard at reviewing their government structures. They explored a government model based on their vision and the principles and values that are essential for the effective functioning of a participative mode of governance. These new structures include the values of interdependence and interconnectedness across the district, the sector of Africa and the worldwide Society. Hopefully the new structure will enable a life-giving way of functioning for the leaders as well as for the membership. The members emphasized the desire for shared leadership and team functioning as the way forward. We hope for a unique African contribution to MMS-life and mission stemming from the African cultural heritage.

We end our report with an excerpt from the African part of the *Core Aspects of MMS Spirituality*.

"Our relationship with the poor has given us a sense of authentic being; they have taught us how to celebrate and how to dance. In African spirituality the person with no relationships is deemed poor no matter how materially rich he might be. We have grown to appreciate the importance of relationships as an essential element of healing.

"As Medical Mission Sisters, we focus our lives beyond national and cultural borders, to become one with people of another nationality, race or tribe, where we are challenged to "see and hear and understand differently", to open our minds and hearts to different values and worldviews.

An Indian MMS in Africa



Indian MMS Philo wrote this letter eight months after her arrival in East Africa.

On my arrival In East Africa I had language study for two months. Though by now I know lots of vocabulary I am not very fluent in speaking Swahili. In some sense I am lucky as majority of people know English and I can communicate with parishioners and workers. When the other two sisters here in our novitiate house, Edith and Mary Ann, were away at Chapter, two of us were holding the fort. I accompanied the Novices to the Intercongregational program. The sessions were very good and I had opportunity to meet sisters and novices from 42 different congregations of both men and women. Our November 'All Members Meeting' gave me the chance to meet sisters from Uganda and Kenya too.

December was a busy month with various activities like making candles, clay models for the crib and cards. Everyone's creativity was challenged which was fun. We also helped our excellent cook to bake biscuits and cakes as well. On Christmas Day the sisters from Anna Dengel community (our house in another area of Nairobi) joined us for lunch and we enjoyed singing Christmas carols. In the month of January Rosemary, the new formator, joined us and is now busy getting acquainted with the novitiate program. Four 1st Year novices arrived at the end of January. I attended a two weeks computer course on accounting, which necessitated me commuting daily to the city changing onto two buses in each direction. I ended up on the road for four hours and then spent six hours at the centre, a long day, but I saw different parts of Nairobi with flowering trees and shrubs and artistically shaped hedges that were a real treat to my eyes. Having our Sector Africa leaders' meeting in Nairobi gave us the opportunity to meet Walburga and Toni from Ethiopia and Ursula from West Africa and learn more about MMS in other parts of Africa.

I do appreciate receiving our newsletter from North India and all those who keep in touch with me. I take this opportunity to wish each one of you a very happy Easter.

Much more recent news received from Philo

In March Rita Ambonsa pronounced her First Vows in our parish church among sisters from Nairobi, Kenya, Uganda and Rubanda. Her family members from Ghana were not present but a few Ghanaian Seminarians in Kenya were there to give a Ghanaian flavor of music and dance. The first year novices danced for the Entrance, Gloria, Offertory and other moments during the Mass. We had a beautiful white tent for the reception at our house. Rita left for Ghana for her home visit and her first mission after visiting the MMS houses in Kenya and Uganda

On Good Friday we walked through the streets of Umoja from 9 am till 4 pm in different Small Christian Community groups for the 'way of the cross'. The rain and muddy roads with pot holes did not stop the young or old. The parish had sponsored red T shirts to raise Funds for the Parish hall and most wore them so we could see a sea of red moving along. At about 4 pm all the groups assembled in the parish feeling hungry, thirsty and tired but were still energized to sing for the Easter Vigil service for which the church was packed. The music and dance was enchanting.

In April we had some good rains so that eased the water shortage. Our community has lost two members but we now have 5 Novices; four in the first year and one in the second year who are attending the Inter Novitiate program for the whole of May. In the first week of May three of us went the 600 km to Mombasa. The road was through farm land where everywhere was lush and green after the rains. We saw Zebra, Giraffe and plenty of Baboons en route. We stayed at the guest house of the Italian Consolata Sisters overlooking the Indian Ocean. The place was very beautiful with rows of coconut, aricanut and mango trees adorning the compound. While white and red frangipani blossoms sent out a lovely fragrance, various kinds of hibiscus, bougainvillea, flame of the forest and golden bridal shower lined the side walk and garden. The weather was very hot and humid but a dip in the ocean cooled us off. The food was very good with Italian style pizza, pasta and fish.

The Ang'iya house blessing in July was a memorable day. This is the new house in our newest area of life and mission in Kenya. Those going from Nairobi travelled in a hired 14-seater Toyota. The drive through the Rift valley gave us panoramic views. There were fields of maize, wheat, bananas and hectares of tea plantations on either side of the road and zebra along the road too. The next day the celebration started at around 11 am amidst great singing and different kinds of dancing. The sisters were given decorated goats, sheep, chicken and bananas, maize, sweet potatoes and many other gifts. We were about 24 MMS and 4 Novices and it was amazing to see how each one found a place to sleep either in the new house or in the dispensary area. The members' meeting began in the evening and continued till noon next day followed by the District leaders' meeting. On the morning of the fifth day we returned to Nairobi.

July and August are winter months with temperatures ranging from 10 to 20 degree centigrade but the days are sunny, so it was very pleasant weather, but we are facing an acute water shortage and the earth is parched and awaiting the monsoon. I have a room on the 1st floor overlooking a spreading umbrella tree, branches of which reach up to my window. It gives me the feeling of being in the woods. At present the tree has shed its leaves and the new shoots are visible. All the mango trees are in bloom, promising a good crop.



Philo with other sisters at the new house

Becoming more accustomed to Nairobi

I travel often into the city, for various errands. On one occasion I attended a seminar at Time Tower, an impressive 30 storey building with very fast lift service, zoom up and zoom down. The seminar hall was on the fifth floor in very well equipped facilities. We had a Power Point presentation demonstrating how to access on line services to pay the PAYE income tax. The question and answers session after each topic was very informative. When going into town, I find it easier and faster to catch an early morning bus. Usually the guard walks me to the bus stop at 5.30 am and in 25 minutes I am in town and can attend Mass too. The number of people attending mass at that time before they start their work at 8 am is amazing. One time in town I decided to pick the mail up from the post office when our driver was on leave. I had no idea that there are thousands of boxes, I happened to start at the bottom line. It is like being in a maze looking for box 53376. I went in and out to many sections, isolated and scary and finally I spotted the 50000 section. At the far end of that section was box 53376 so at last I could pick up the mail. There are some land marks in town which I look to for directions, a tall green building, the Hilton Hotel for travel agents and the yellow National Archives. Once I walked three times around the Archives to find a bus to Westlands, for medical insurance work. While visiting that office, I make it a point to visit our sisters at Anna Dengel Community at Westlands. There are also a couple living there from my brother's village and I am looking forward to join them for the Indian Onam celebration in September. In October I will be going to Kampala, Uganda for the District Assembly and hope to visit our mission in Rubanda.



Two doctors in one out-patient consulting room



Patients increasing, work space the same

*We need
more
space in
a
hospital
in
Ethiopia*

Filipino MMS doctor Toni and German MMS doctor Rita write:

In 2009 Attat Hospital celebrated its 40th anniversary after the start of services in 1969. A recent assessment has shown that we have reached a critical point concerning space. The services have increased, the patients are increasing but the space to do the work remained the same. We even have two doctors working in the same consultation room.

We need more space for the laboratory, for tests and for final year students coming from the Health Science College for practical experience. We need more space in the waiting area especially to limit further spread of tuberculosis which is on the increase. We need to establish a proper emergency room and a bigger operating theatre.

As services have expanded we have more staff and need more consultation rooms and adequate facilities for the increased staff numbers. The staff, especially the doctors would value library space for reference and study and a proper meeting room. In our plans all areas will become accessible for patients on trolleys and wheel chairs and all will have roofing against rain. The estimated cost is about 800,000 Euros. We are looking for partners in this project and are most grateful for any kind of support.

The floods in Pakistan

In August American MMS Sylvia wrote from Faisalabad:

Days of rain and mudslides started along the mountainous areas of the Northwestern border. The water overflowed the banks of the rivers flooding the fields and the villages. It moved south and flooded much of the lower parts of Sindh Province. Millions have been affected. These are the worst floods in history perhaps causing more destruction than the earthquake of 2005 when thousands lost their lives. Rescue teams have had difficulty in getting to the victims because of the heavy rains and gushing waters. Now most people have left the affected areas and are staying with relatives or in camps set up by the government. Some are reluctant to leave their property and their few belongings. There is a great shortage of food, drinking water and medicines. Besides the army, local NGO's and international organizations (especially UN and Red Cross) are assisting the relief efforts. We are also in partnership with reliable NGOs. Our MMS communities in Faisalabad and Lahore are safe although we have had heavy rains and the cities have been flooded.

In October Sylvia wrote again:

The flood waters continue to spread in some areas of the Sindh and more people have had to leave their villages. Much of the agriculture land is under water affecting the cotton crop, sugar cane, rice vegetables and fruits. Prices are already going up. Fodder for animals has also been destroyed which will affect the poor farmers who depend on their animals for their livelihood. Fortunately in some places the water is receding so a few people can return to their homes. Basic things, food, drinking water and medicines are still needed and haven't reached some places. I went with the Caritas health team to distribute food items and tents and give some medical help.



and some responses

The Response from the UK government.

The British public have made a major contribution through the Disasters Emergency Committee totalling £60m to date (in October 2010). That is a tremendous effort, reflecting the deep generosity of people in this country. The Government is also doing its part. We were one of the first to respond to the crisis by providing rapid practical help to those affected by the disaster. Our £134 million in aid has provided support to half a million malnourished children and pregnant or breast feeding women, safe drinking water for 800,000 people, shelter for more than 84,000 people and much more. We fully agree that we need to ensure that the international community supports Pakistan through relief, recovery and reconstruction from the flooding, and we have been actively lobbying other governments on this front. However we do not consider debt relief to be the most effective way to support Pakistan at this time.

From Medical Mission Sisters

Since Pakistan is very heavily in debt already, it is sad that they will be loaded with yet more debt and with no debt relief. In our working for justice we continue to talk to our MPs about how this situation can be changed with the necessary relief being given as grants rather than loans. We continue to urge our MPs to work by all possible means to protect the environment, for the reduction of carbon emissions and to reduce the danger of disastrous climate change.



A group, including English MMS Daphne (far right) lobbied her MP (centre)

*Joy
at
Christmas
and
in
2011*



OBITUARY

*Please pray for Mr Bernard Boal -
Middlesborough.*

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