



Dear Friends

“There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.”

~ Archbishop Oscar Romero

As summer approaches, most of us delight in the warmth of long days and a more relaxed way of life. For MMM, it means travel around the country, the warm welcome we receive in parishes, and meeting the wonderful people who affirm and support our mission. This is a great source of encouragement and hope and we are truly grateful. It means saying “yes” again to our vocation and all that it entails. Yes, even the search for funding!

A reflection I read during Lent about saying “yes” is still resonating with me. I read it around the time I received the ministry reports from our Sisters in Siquatepeque and Choloma in Honduras. For me, they and their teams embody the best of saying “yes” and it is the work in Siquatepeque that I share with you in this newsletter. We say “yes” to hope, to joy, to justice, to wisdom, to compassion but this “yes” requires resolve, fidelity, and generosity. A short time ago, I listened to a group of men and women here in Chicago as they reflected on their experience of being in Honduras as witnesses for peace during the recent elections and inauguration of a government that is most questionable, but certainly very militarist and violent. As I listened to their stories and shared their tears, I realized they were saying “yes” to a vision of peace and human dignity that is requiring of them a physical, mental and emotional commitment to achieve.

Our presence in the parish of Meáambar in the mountains around Siquatepeque is about saying “yes” to a vision of our Christian Gospel in which

each person is valued and offered a chance to live as God intended.

Frequently, we share our gratitude for your fidelity to our healing mission. Along with you, our partners, we rely on the support of various foundations and donor agencies. One of them is the Conrad Hilton Fund for Sisters which is part of the Conrad Hilton Foundation.

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Certainly, they have helped our projects in Honduras in past years, but in 2018, this Fund is supporting the provision of water and sustainable energy in our mission in Kasina in Malawi, and a program of awareness-raising about the serious issue of human trafficking in the Singida District of Tanzania. As Sisters on mission, the affirmation, solidarity, and support we receive from the Conrad Hilton Fund for Sisters is immeasurable. If you would like to know more about them do look at their wonderful web-site. We are deeply grateful to everyone, but especially you who care so much about our world.



Blessings on your summer,

Sister Joanne

Sister Joanne Bierl, MMM
Development Director

Cover Photo:
MMM Assembly of the
Americans in Honduras
with Sisters Therese,
Bernadette, Danielle,
Cleide, Gladys, and
Joanne in the back
row. Sisters Mary Ann,
Margaret, Miranilza and
Renee in the front row.

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Summer 2018

This is what we are about:

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. ~ Archbishop Oscar Romero

Honduras, where MMM has made its home since 1998, is the second largest and most mountainous country in Central America with a population of over 9 million people, 54.64% of whom are under the age of 24. In 2015 adolescent pregnancies (137 out of every 1000) were registered to teenagers between ages of 10-19. This statistic is the second highest in Central America fuelled by low levels of maternal education and poor access to services. Honduras is the second poorest country in Central America second only to Haiti.



Team member Telma Martínez preparing for her group presentation.

Rampant crime and the lack of impunity for human rights abuses remains the norm in Honduras. Although the murder rate continues to decline from 85.5 per 100,000 in 2011 to 43.6 per 100,000 in 2017, Honduras still remains 'one of the world's deadliest peacetime nations'. It continues to suffer a crisis of gender based violence with one woman killed every 14 hours and fewer than one in five of these deaths are investigated. It is not just murder; it is also the shocking number of rapes, assaults

and domestic violence cases happening with near total impunity.

Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America for human rights defenders especially for human rights and land activists. According to the UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, 14,735 Hondurans sought asylum world-wide, with most coming to Mexico and the USA. Large numbers continue to be forcibly deported back to the same life threatening situations which initially forced them to escape their country. **Having said all of the above, Honduras is a country of extraordinary beauty, peopled with men and women of great faith, integrity and courage in the midst of great poverty.**

Meámbar is located in the north west of the department of Comayagua, 40 kilometres north east of the city of Siguatepeque. More than half the communities where we work have problems with water, if they have tap water they only receive water once a week, one community has a communal washing area and others get their water from other sources such as water springs, rivers and wells.

There are four Health Centers in the municipality, one in Meámbar Center has a student doctor (6/12 rotation), a registered nurse midwife and a number of auxiliary staff. Each of the other 3 Health Centers are staffed by an auxiliary nurse. None of the 4 Health Centres are equipped to help a Mother safely delivery her baby. Pregnant women need to travel to

Siguatepeque, one and a half to two hours away by public transport, which is the closest Health Centre providing this service. The nearest hospital to Meámbar is located in Comayagua which is 2-3 hours away by public transport. Many women choose to deliver their babies in their local communities for economic reasons.

In Meámbar centre and the surrounding communities, there are problems with violence, gangs and drugs. With few chances of employment, many families rely on the remittances sent each month by family members in the USA. It is a regular sight to see groups of young men sitting around early in the morning and they are still there on our return in the afternoon.

In this context, the main focus of our MMM project is Awareness Raising and Capacity Building. Our focus is on Health, Human Development, Human Rights, Violence, Gender and Care of the Environment. **We have formed Youth Groups in 15 communities, Children's groups in 8 communities and Women's groups in 13 communities. We visit on a regular basis and each time we see some progress. Most notable is when someone begins to feel like they matter, they have a voice and their life has value.**

Knowing that cancer of the cervix is the number one cause of death in women in Honduras, we included in 2017 a Survey of the Cytology services available to the women in the municipality of Méambar.

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Team members Vilma Garcia and Antonio Molina at work planning.

The purpose of doing the survey was to determine how many women had access to cytology screening, received results, treatment, etc. Having completed the survey we now have sufficient background information to meet with the Registered nurse practitioner in the Meámbar Health Centre to discuss how best to address women's needs.

Four workshops on the Environment were planned around the theme of Care of the Environment with special emphasis on Deforestation and Reforestation. These workshops were facilitated by Joel Martínez, a Forestry Technician. We chose the most central community in each sector for the location of the workshops, put up posters in the schools and Churches and local shops. We were impressed with the interest and the participation level of those who attended. Another positive outcome of the workshops was that there is a marked increase in the number of women and youth participating in the environmental restoration groups in the communities where the workshops were held.

Violence in the municipality of Meámbar.

There was an increase in the number of assaults on people either walking, riding motorbikes or in vehicles in the municipality of Meámbar in 2017. These assaults were carried out by young gang members whose identities are often known to the local people. These gang members were armed and often 'high' on drugs. In the early months of the year there were numerous assaults on buses, lorries carrying food products and other commodities and services to the communities. Electricity and telephone company personnel as well as the local people were killed or seriously injured when they failed to follow the commands of the gang members.

The people in the communities lived in fear and many of the women were too afraid to attend anti-natal clinics or bring their children for vaccinations.

"In August as we were returning from a meeting, our car was stopped by two armed and masked men demanding money, one of whom was obviously on drugs. They demanded money and phones but thankfully they didn't ask us to step out of the car, which helped us to stay calm. Although we had given them what we had, one of them kept waving the gun and demanding more. Thankfully after some minutes they allowed us to pass. The following weeks saw an increased police presence accompanied by the military police patrolling the roads between communities and a number of men were arrested.

After the assault on our vehicle, the people did not expect us to continue working in the communities and were really surprised that we did. The fact that we continue visiting the communities has deepened and strengthened our relationship with the people, a positive outcome from a negative and frightening experience!"

MMM also is engaged in the local **Parish of El Carmen in Siguatepeque** and visits and supports a **Home for the Elderly**. We also support our MMM Associates in the **Ongoing activities in Marcala, La Paz where we began our life in Honduras and passed over our ministry to our local Associates**. The sisters travel to Marcala once a month for the Associates meeting and are inspired at the commitment of each associate to living out the MMM charism in their daily lives with family, friends and neighbours and in their communities located in the mountains surrounding Marcala.

Our ministries in Honduras are examples of Archbishop Romero's famous quote: "This is what we are about: We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold **future promise.**" **That belief fuels daily life in Honduras!** ■



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Sisters Bernadette Heneghan, Margaret Nakafu, and Cleide da Silva, the MMM Sisters who are members of our team in Meámbar.

~ Archbishop Oscar Romero
“A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed — what gospel is that?”