How many times, when taking a train, have you heard the warning: “Mind the gap”? One morning we were stopped in a station. A woman stepping out of the train slipped on the threshold, falling into the space between the train and the platform. Before someone could shout, “Tell the driver!” four men had organized themselves, two on either side of the gap, reached down and lifted her out. A bit shaken, but otherwise unhurt, the woman was ready to continue her journey. The people who had helped her slipped away.

At Christmas, we are reminded that at one point in history, God also reached down to live among us and lift us out of the gaps in our troubled lives. Then, as now God used unlikely people to bring the news in concrete ways. In the Gospels, a story relates how a paralyzed man depended on four of his friends to bring him to Jesus for healing. They persisted in their task despite great obstacles – there was a crowd in the way – even carrying the man’s mat to the roof and digging through it to get to Jesus. After his healing the man picked up his mat and left, so presumably his friends also slipped away unnoticed. (Mk 2.1)

Since his Resurrection, Jesus has remained with us and continues to work in our world with all its problems. He continues to use others, often our most unlikely fellow-travellers, to reveal God’s love for us. This Christmas we thank all of you who, often unnoticed, have reached out with us to help others today.
Christmas is a time for beginning anew. Our MMM Congregational Leadership Team accepted a recommendation for the founding of a new ministry in Tanzania. Associate Eamonn Brehony, who is part of the MMM Resource Team, was asked to write about the initial research for this project.

“In Ngaramtoni, on the outskirts of Arusha, MMM is beginning an intervention to improve the health of people in poor remote communities. Although Arusha is the headquarters of the East African Community and one of the top tourist destinations in Africa, one has only to go fifteen kilometres on the way to Nairobi to experience another side of life. In some remote villages in Mukulat Division of Arusha Rural District, with a population of 80,000 people, many children have not been vaccinated. The access of families to adequate water and food depends on the vagaries of weather. Poor rainfall often means a desperate search for water and food. Malnutrition is a problem. In some households, people have vegetables and eggs but sell them rather than eat them. There are regular food shortages in Oldonyo Sambu and Nengunga villages. Previous experience in some communities shows that people are slow to change and very quickly go back to their old habits.

A NEED TO ADDRESS GENDER ISSUES

“The way women are perceived is another critical issue. Elders say, ‘Women are children and their job is to do as they are told.’ Men leave their wives to go to Nairobi and other centres for work and only return for annual holidays. They tend to leave women to look after the children but without financial support. Men get other wives, bringing many problems to the family. Women seldom have their rights to property realised in such situations.
“There are problems with alcohol and drug addiction. A lot of bhangi (marijuana) is grown in the area and it is a lucrative cash crop. Women depend on the business for income. They pack the bhangi but the business side is controlled by men. Women try to gain the co-operation of men to gain business through sexual favours.

“The Ministry of Health has a small hospital in the district but access for rural communities on a regular and planned basis is often a challenge. There is lack of reliable and regular transport. Because MMM had successfully co-operated with the district on community-based health care and HIV/AIDS programmes, it made sense to resurrect this collaboration. When MMM suggested doing a needs assessment in the area, district health officials were happy to work with us. The assessment found that six villages within a fifteen kilometre radius of the MMM compound do not have health facilities and that there is need to strengthen the Government health outreach programme. The assessment concluded that priority issues are: the lack of health-related education in schools; the need for rights-based education, especially for women; and the distance that villagers have to travel to access curative services if there is no health unit in their village.

WORKING TOGETHER

“The Catholic parish of Ngaramtoni expressed interest in MMM having a small curative health service. The needs assessment suggested the development of a curative and preventative health programme in conjunction with the District Government and the Catholic parish. MMM leadership, the District Government, and local church have all accepted this idea.

“This new MMM programme will strengthen the District Government’s ability to offer good quality curative and, most particularly, preventative health services to the most vulnerable and marginalised people where we live.

“Our dream is that as the programme develops, women and particularly younger girls will be sensitised, with a special focus on the rights of the girl child.”
Seeing all things New

“Here is an update to share how I have been experiencing Honduras and some of my impressions of this place of great need. I am really grateful for the opportunity to be here and serve. I am continually impressed with our Sisters, Associates, staff, and the Honduran people, from whom I am learning so much!

“I had the chance to spend some time with Bernie Heneghan in the mountain area of Marcala. I joined in some of the groups held for the kids and the women’s groups. The roads up to these communities are pretty rough, and after a good rain, it can be quite the challenge to get to these remote areas. I kept thinking: if MMM were not here, who else would be coming all this way up these muddy roads to reach these people and serve them?

“I loved the way the children in these mountain communities engaged and were so excited to participate in the activities. The kids were having some fun, too. The activities ranged from math and Spanish skills development, to learning about their bodies in a healthy way, along with some crafts and recreation. There was also an opportunity for the children to talk about their lives and express their feelings. While there were many good messages communicated, I felt the most important message they were receiving was that they matter and they are important.

**IMPORTANCE OF GROUP SUPPORT**

“From what I witnessed in the women’s groups, they have a great opportunity to receive support and be empowered, and also to learn parenting skills and health education. Some of these women walk long distances to attend. It was clear that they really value these groups and feel enriched by them. It was great to see the camaraderie among them. It can make a big difference to have a space to connect and feel supported, and that was what I saw happening. They work so hard to care for their families and are examples of generosity and perseverance.

“I was so impressed to see the great work being done by Bernie, Cleide da Silva, and the staff, as well as the results of the work done by Sisters and Associates who ministered here in previous years. It was easy to see the commitment and generosity that had gone into developing these programs!

“Now I am back at language school in Copan. I am grateful for this opportunity to learn Spanish, which is essential to ministering here.
Supplement to Healing & Development

MMMs meet First Lady of Kenya

On 9 November 2014, MMM Sisters Kathie Shea, Radegunda Shayo, and Patricia Lanigan had the privilege of meeting the First Lady of Kenya, Mrs Margaret Gakuo Kenyatta, in Nairobi. She assumed the office after the inauguration of her husband in 2013. Since then Mrs. Kenyatta has been running a campaign to reduce child and maternal mortality rates, the Beyond Zero Campaign. The Campaign is part of the initiatives outlined in her strategic framework towards HIV control and promotion of maternal, newborn and child health in Kenya.*

With a maternal mortality rate of 488 deaths per 100,000 live births, Kenya is behind in achieving UN Millennium Development Goal numbers four and five by 2015. Now the country had committed to reduce these deaths to 147 per 100,000 live births by 2015.

For her efforts, on October 24, 2014, she was named the 2014 United Nations’ Person of the Year. Mrs Kenyatta became the only First Lady to complete two marathons for the maternal health campaign. Sister Kathie took the opportunity to thank her for all she is doing in health care for women and their children.

“What a gracious woman,” Sister Kathie commented.

*From the Beyond Zero website
Sister Cyrina Ogbebor wrote about a new ministry that MMM plans to start in Orlu, Nigeria. She is part of the team that will first live among the local people and discern with them what their needs are and how MMM can best respond.

“Our joy knew no bounds when we heard that Bishop Augustine Ukwuoma of Orlu Diocese had invited MMM to the diocese and given us land for a new ministry. Abajah, in Orlu, in eastern Nigeria, is in a very rural area and has many needs.

“Our plan is not to start with structures but to live with the community and study the environment to discover the people’s needs. We are to build our MMM charism and core values into whatever we do from the start so as to sustain our relationship with the people. It is essential to first build a rapport with the people, living among them and offering an apostolate of presence. Our primary mission is to befriend, work closely and grow with them.

“In sharing their lives, we plan to assess the real needs of the local community before embarking on any project. The assessment will be done by close observation and a simple survey methodology that will be more qualitative than quantitative. The location of available facilities, their level of utilization, the prevalent health challenges, and the needs not currently being met, can be starting points in building the necessary baseline information we need. We will also record the number of homes and families in the area. Community-based preventive health care will be key.

“We will work with the community leaders, members of the local parish and representatives of the villagers. With our MMM Area Leadership we will plan what services we will give. We also plan to eventually have a home for our retired Sisters and a house for postulants.

“Sisters Nkiru Agunwa, Ifeoma Ifedi and I were assigned to this mission. The local parish has acquired an apartment for us. The mission will begin on 11 December 2014 when we move from Benin City with our Area Leader, Sr Ekaete Ekop.

“As a pioneer member of this new mission, I am excited and I look forward to the newness that awaits us in Abajah. I cannot help but ask, ‘What will this child become?’”’ Lk 1:66”
Sister Theresia Samti, MMM

One of the first MMMs from Tanzania, Sister Theresia was born in Dareda in 1937. She trained as a teacher before joining MMM in Ireland in 1959 and later trained as a nurse-midwife in Drogheda.

In 1968 she was assigned to Tanzania and worked in Makiungu Hospital for nine years, and in Kitovu Hospital, Uganda for a year. Sister Theresia spent over eleven years in guiding women in their early years in MMM and nine years in MMM leadership. In 1999 she was assigned to Ethiopia, where she spent four years, again as a nurse-midwife. After two years in MMM’s international novitiate in Kenya, Sister Theresia returned to Tanzania in 2011. She died in Ngaramtoni, Tanzania, on 12 November 2014, after a long illness.

Sister Helen Lavin, MMM

Sister Helen Lavin was born in Barnsley, England in 1923. Before joining MMM in 1949, she was part of the team of women in Bletchley Park, England who helped to unravel the Enigma Code. She trained in general nursing, children’s nursing, and in midwifery. Her first mission assignment was in 1962, to Nigeria, where she spent seven years. She then nursed Mother Mary before an assignment to Naples. She was infirmarian at Kylemore Abbey before a further seven years in Nigeria.

Sister Helen returned to Ireland in 1985 and worked in Drogheda. She was then warden and did voluntary work in facilities for the elderly in England. She retired to the MMM Motherhouse in 2000 and transferred to Aras Mhuire in 2008. She died peacefully in Aras Mhuire on 17 November 2014 after a long illness.

Sister Mary Casey, MMM

Sister Mary was born in Mullingar, County Westmeath in 1926 and joined MMM in 1946. She trained as a nurse and spent six years in Naples, Italy. After three years in the Dublin Nunciature she worked for thirteen years in Spain between Madrid, where she did promotion work and taught English, and Leon, where she was hospital matron and was in charge of the nursing school.

Sister Mary trained as a midwife and worked in Kabanga Hospital in Tanzania for three years. After five years as the MMM Lay Personnel Representative, she served for a year in Liberia. In 1988 she joined the MMM community in Artane, Dublin and trained in counselling and pastoral formation. She spent sixteen years as Parish Sister and was involved in adult literacy and work with MMM Associates. After moving to Raheny she continued pastoral visiting and literacy work.

In January 2014, Sister Mary suffered a sudden illness and was later transferred to our nursing facility in Drogheda. She died in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital on 14 September 2014.
Our Promise to our Donors

When a donor specifies a country, project or special need (e.g. women’s development, AIDS), 100% of that donation is transferred to the specified country or project. We allocate non-specified donations to the most urgent needs overseas or add them to our General Mission Fund, which pays for airfares, professional training of Sisters, and emergency needs overseas.

Your Privacy is Important:
We respect your privacy. Any information that you provide to us will only be used for the purpose for which it is given, and will be processed in compliance with the Irish Data Protection Legislation. It will not be shared with any other organisation, unless required by law, or requested by you, such as for the processing of a tax claim.

How you can help us with our work

- Pray with us. We remember you each day.
- Make a donation by mail or online at www.mmmworldwide.org
- Join us as members of MMM.
- Share our charism as an MMM Associate.
- Leave an enduring gift of health and healing in your will.
  Remembering us in your will or giving a donation in memory of a loved one will help us to plan for our work.
  You can specify how and where your gift will be used.
  Please include: “the Congregational Leader, for the time being, of the Medical Missionaries of Mary.”

We wish all our friends a Very Happy Christmas

Our Addresses:
Please mail your donation to:

MMM Communications, Rosemount Terrace,
Booiterstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland. Tel: +353 1 2887180

OR Mission Development Office, 4425 W 63rd St, Ste 100
Chicago, IL 60629-5565. Tel: 773-735-3712

OR Direct to our Bank Account:
Medical Missionaries of Mary, Bank of Ireland, Merrion Road, Dublin 4, Ireland.
Sort Code: 90-12-12. Account Number: 62835417
IBAN IE88 BOFI 9012 1262 8354 17 BIC (Swift) BOFIIE2D

N.B.: Ask your Bank to include your name with your transfer.
In the USA, we are a Tax Exempt 501 (c) (3) Non-Profit Organization.

Come visit us at: www.mmmworldwide.org