

Memories of Meme.

Nora T McCarthy.

My memory of Meme contains a soul connection from a much earlier time in my life. For those unfamiliar with Cameroon, Meme is in the north of the country close to Mount Mandura. It is the Muslims from Mandura that serve the majority of the people in this area. Of the total population in this area 24% is Muslim; 12% is Christian of which 4.2% are Catholic. As you will see the Catholics form a very small minority of the population. Statistics inform us that highest illiteracy rate in the country is in this part of Cameroon. My trip to the Cameroon and principally to Meme was as Liaison Officer for Misesan Cara and my task was to monitor and evaluate projects which had been funded by that organisation. 'Misesan Cara' translates from the Irish language as 'friend of the mission' and it provides funding for Healthcare, Education, Development - human and organisational, Disaster and other emergency situations.

Anna Mary Mukamwezi who was the then Provincial of Africa graciously accompanied me from Yaoundé. It was pleasant flight of about an hour and we were blessed to be able to get a flight on that particular day, as on many occasions our sisters have to travel by train or bus. Even then- if I remember- they still had to journey on foot for the final part of the journey. On my arrival in Meme I was welcomed with excitement and enthusiasm by our sisters. At the same time I was also aware of the heat and the poverty.

The project that I had to monitor and evaluate was the youth centre which offered an alternative system of education for young women who previously would have no hope of receiving any kind of education. The centre received €36,785 from Misesan Cara the purpose of which was:

- To build the proposed centre.
- Digging a borehole with an immersion pump.
- Expenses to defray costs of training workshops.
- Buying material for the participants and for the course.

Each participant in the course was also expected to bring some food for the three month course as well as (where



Course Participants

possible) a small amount of money. The course was for three months in two consecutive years as the girls had to return home to help with harvesting.

On my tour of the youth training centre and its facilities I was deeply touched by the enthusiasm of our young sisters and their willingness to be involved. They were aware of trying to serve the needs of the people through this youth project. They were also very aware that this ministry was in line with the charism of the congregation in trying to promote the education of the whole person and in this case with special attention to women and young girls. As I reflected on my experience in the centre that evening it touched instantly into my own soul connection and evoked a memory. At the age of 35 when I was wondering where I would go with my life somebody sent me a paper which stated that the Ladies of Mary were founded for the education of youth. I knew instantly this was where I could hang my hat and my searching ended.

Now I was in Cameroon thinking those thoughts. In the evening as the sun went down the women brought out their children to wash them under a tap from Jennifer’s well. Funding for the well was provided by the family of our deceased sister Jennifer Condron who died in Cameroon. The tap water was such a blessing to all who used it. This well was another connection with the past for me as I was a volunteer in Kampala in 1961 while Jennifer was a volunteer in Maryhill. May Jennifer rest in peace. As I looked at the children revelling in the joy of running water I thought what a profound way to be remembered by bringing water to the people in this area.



As well as the four sisters working in this education project, Priscilla a DMJ midwife was also deeply involved in the education of HIV/AIDS persons in counselling, testing and prevention and was ably assisted by the other sisters in addressing their needs.

All in all education in the broad sense of the word was so evident in this visit for me. The girls and women displayed the garments that they had made as part of their course. In doing so they

truly displayed a sense of confidence, self- assurance and liberation. Some went back home after the 3 months course able to share their skills with others as well as being able to purchase a sewing machine to generate income to help look after their family.

When I heard that we had to leave Meme for safety reasons I was sad, as I remembered all the work invested in this ministry by Hedwig, Martina, Priscilla, Arlette, and Anna Marie and other DMJ sisters. Very many young sisters worked there at different times. This ministry has huge possibilities as I saw it. At some stage boys wanted to join the course as they saw the progress the girls and the women had made. It also had the support of the Parish Priest as well as from many people locally.

I am so happy to hear that we as congregation may be returning to Meme in the future when security will not be an issue.



As I mentioned, initially re the division of the funding - some of it was designated for the purchase of an immersion pump and digging a bore hole. Soon after the water supply was initiated, there were horrific floods in central Africa and the entire water system in the project was uprooted and carried away with the force of the water. Some months later Miseen Cara granted us €14,930, to replace

the water system with much more durable equipment. This time they had to employ a hydro-geological company from Chad to replace the water system.

As I was finalising my report for Miseen Cara in Meme the company were busy trying to excavate a place suitable and deep enough to protect future water supplies. Suddenly – in the midst of that arduous work- there was a cascade of water which attracted men, women and children from all around the area. It was a sight to behold.

May the seeds that were first sown by our sisters Monique Boils and Louis Marie Hanrahan in 1980 in Mayo Ouldeme and by other sisters since then continue to grow and blossom in abundance.

Sr. Nora T. McCarthy

