

## My D.M.J. Impressions

Written by Fr Pat Seaver, Diocese of Limerick.



My connection with the D.M.Js was made through my friend Noel Higgins, who married Maria Raleigh. Her friend, Sr. Patricia Pearson invited me to visit the Padre Pio Leprosy Rehabilitation Centre in Ahotokurom, Cape Coast, Ghana, and this I did for the first time in July 1995. I got such a warm welcome and enjoyed my 'bus-man's' holiday so much that I have returned there every year up to and including the present year of 2017.

What I see and experience are a group of nuns dedicated to the spreading of the good news in a warm, open and generous manner. Unlike many convents and monasteries, of which I have had plenty of experience, the Sisters' house in Ahotokurom has an open door. One could find any number and variety of callers. The children from the Child-care Unit are at home there. People in need often see the Sisters as their last hope when it comes to basic needs, fees for the children's education, or perhaps a family bereavement. Other religious invariably get a great welcome. Since 2003, a number of students from the University of Limerick have used the Centre as an official placement centre, where they spend six months and are given credits for their work in the various schools, hospitals, villages and in the centre itself. There have also been visits from transition students from the Crescent Comprehensive College and Castletroy College. There are also connections from an English based 'Friends of Ahotokurom' who visit on a regular basis and are given a wonderful welcome.

However, what has impressed me most of all, is the way the Sisters, unlike most of the religious orders with which I am familiar, have involved the local people at a level of management and ownership that is wonderful. They have a board of management whose members are mostly local. One of its members is the chief from a neighbouring village, who is Muslim. In fact, the C.E.O is a gentleman whose parents were leprosy sufferers, and who was himself reared in the Centre. The fact that he has a Ph.D also says something significant about the way in which the Sisters have managed the mission and helped the local people develop their talents. As the members of the community obviously see it: the mission is the work of the Lord, not theirs. May the Lord bless their work.