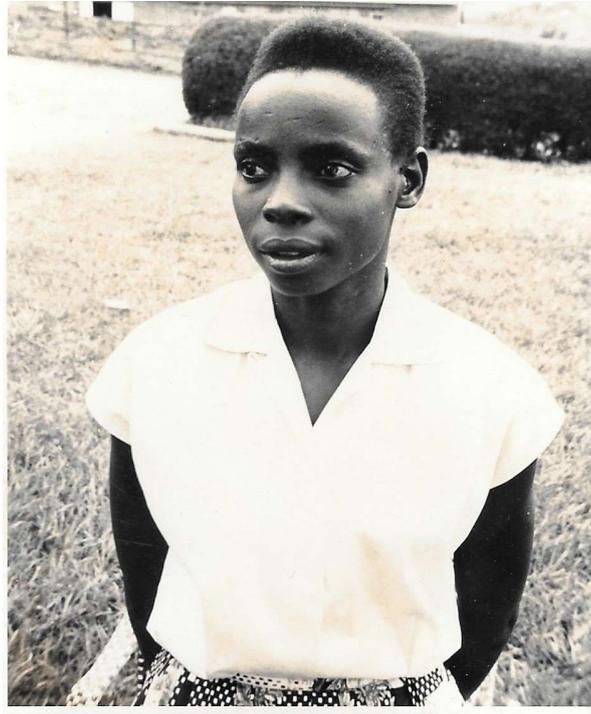


Sr Valeria Bamukuhiza, DMJ.



I think I am one of the few DMJ who remember Valeria. My first contact with her was in November 1960 when we opened the dispensary at Nyamitanga. In this very new ministry we were looking for girls who would assist in the work and Valeria was recommended to us. She was then a house-girl working for a French couple, Mons and Mme Villain who were running the printing press. At our request her employers very kindly released her. Valeria came from the Kitabi side of the Diocese and both her parents had died. She was delighted to come and work with us in the dispensary.

In this area of work which was very new to her she was eager to learn, and for me a tremendous support in translating and in familiarizing me with various aspects of the culture. As time went on we became good friends. One day the Parish priest from Rwera arrived at the dispensary with one of his catechists whose wife had died leaving her newborn baby - a beautiful healthy baby girl. "Please, will you take her and look after her?" asked Fr Servelle. We thought about the request and Valeria said she would care for her - Baby Jane Mbabazi - which she did until

she was adopted into Sr Josephine Beebwa's family.

One day Valeria came to me, saying she would like to join our Congregation. I took her request to our superior - Sr Mary Hilda (Kathleen Rathe) who said it would be better for her to join a local Congregation as she had no secondary education or formal training. Valeria was very disappointed, but did not give up. She continued to work at the dispensary until 1965 when she moved to Kinyamasika TTC, Fort Portal to take up the role of matron. Our sisters at the college were very impressed by her sense of duty and her competence.

However, Valeria was intent on acquiring a 'certificate' that could qualify her for acceptance as a Lady of Mary (DMJ). She applied to Sanyu Baby Home in Kampala to train as a nurse. This was a Church of Uganda institution and at that time in Uganda Catholic/Protestant relationships were not the best. Nevertheless, Valeria was accepted and found she was the only Catholic on the staff. As time went on she was totally accepted and appreciated. When she successfully finished the course she was appointed staff nurse which shows how greatly valued she was.

Not too long afterwards we got word from the Baby Home that she was ill and has been admitted to Mulago Hospital. She was diagnosed with high blood pressure, was treated and discharged back to the baby home where she resumed work after a period of convalescence. However it was not long before a health problem re-emerged and she was again admitted to Mulago hospital. The diagnosis was essential hypertension. She remained in hospital for some weeks but her condition deteriorated with the onset of kidney failure. Valeria was terminally ill. The staff of The Baby Home were very attentive to her all through her illness.

When we, the Sisters in Mbarara, realised that her illness was so serious we arranged to bring her to Mbarara to be cared for. She had a room in the convent annex where she received loving care. Daily she became weaker. Valeria still pined to be a Lady of Mary. She once again requested to be admitted into the Congregation. She knew that her days on earth were short but her desire was to pronounce vows and die a Lady of Mary. It was an unusual request

which we put to the then Vicar general of the Diocese. Monsignor Hilary Tibanyenda. In the circumstances Msgr Hilary granted the request. One night shortly before her death the community came together around her bed for a very meaningful ceremony during which she pronounced her vows. Her face lit up and with a big smile she said, : 'At last I am a Lady of Mary.' Her remaining few days were very peaceful. We were all at her bedside when God took her home to Himself in March 1969.

Bishop Ogez was the main celebrant of her funeral Mass. The cathedral was packed and the Bishop told the congregation of her struggle and perseverance in her desire to become a Sister. After the Mass we laid her to rest in the parish cemetery. Her headstone in the cemetery says: Sr Valeria Bamukuhiza, Lady of Mary.

Sr Brigid Stokes.