

The DMJ Sisters – “Courageous Women and Agents of Change in Contemporary African Societies”

By Beatrice Ntowah (Aunty Bea) Ahotokurom, Ghana, West Africa

Beatrice Ntowah, originally from Prekuma is a survivor of leprosy. Before her introduction to Daughters of Mary and Joseph – Bea thought life as she knew it was over, due to the crippling effects of her disease. It was when Bea was at her lowest and felt hopeless for any prospect of a bright future because of her condition; she was introduced to Br. Vincent, a member of the Franciscan Friars, while working at a dress-making centre in 1982. After a year had passed, in 1983 through the Franciscan Friars Bea was introduced to Sisters from the Daughters of Mary and Joseph and it was since then her life changed forever. Bea’s relationship with DMJ brought a wealth of new opportunities and experiences to her life. They helped to give her an education – Sr. Shelia trained Bea in first aid, while Sr. Pat trained her in childcare, allowing her to secure a job in the childcare facility at the Padre Pio Rehabilitation Centre here in Ahotokurom. This knowledge and experience allowed her to be eligible for so many new opportunities that would not have passed her way in the past. In 1990, she was sent abroad to England to experience working with children with disabilities such as epilepsy. Bea was the first person in her community to ever travel abroad from Ghana, so you can imagine the enormous amount of priceless experience and lessons she gained from such a trip. Bea’s DMJ family were so impressed with her work ethic and determination to make a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged, that they wanted to help her to build a life back in Ghana. They gifted her the building of a new home in the village of Abbe, here in Cape Coast, changing her life dramatically. Bea’s successful career, her contacts with the congregation and her new home significantly lessened the stigma that plagued leprosy sufferers and survivors at the time. The local people were now significantly more open to interacting and establishing relationships with people affected by leprosy, and Bea formed great friendships within and around the village community. Opportunities continued to arise for Bea over the years through her relationship with the Sisters of DMJ – such as being invited to The Netherlands to stay with friends of the Sisters, and travelling the America to attend a conference. Another big milestone in Bea’s life was when she was introduced to John, a friend of Sr. Monica’s from Ireland, who practised endorphin release therapy. After seeing the benefits it brought to her, Bea was determined to learn how to practise it herself in order to help her friends who have suffered deformities due to leprosy. Sr. Monica and Bea continued to travel to different hospitals in



Auntie Bea and her Grandchildren

Ghana providing this therapy to patients and making a positive impact on their lives. Bea now works in Ahotokurom at the Padre Pio Rehabilitation centre, providing endorphin release therapy to leprosy survivors and disabled children, while also working at the centres childcare facility. Bea is extremely proud of Daughters of Mary and Joseph, and is forever grateful for all they have done for her in her lifetime.