

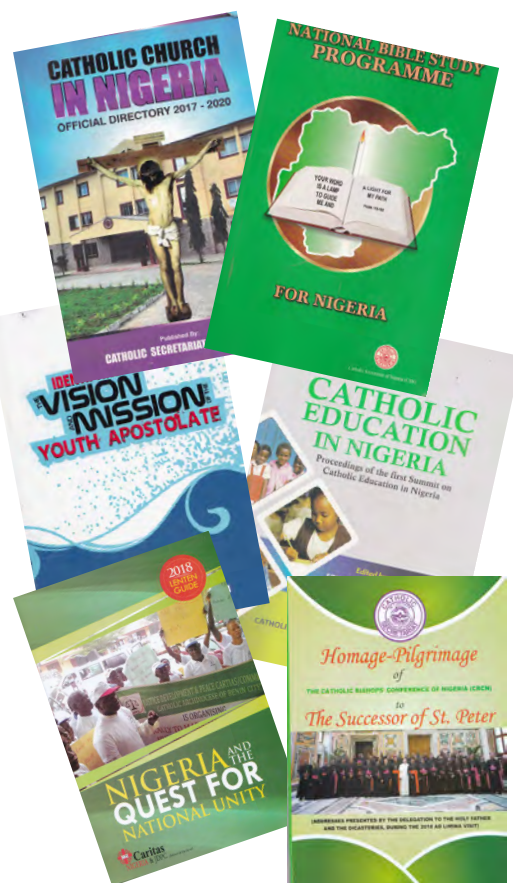
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PUBLICATIONS FROM CSN STABLE



COVER PICTURES (CLOCKWISE)

1. Most Rev. Moses Chikwe, Auxilliary Bishop of Owerri
2. Most Rev. Augustine Echema, Bishop of Aba Diocese
3. Most Rev. Julius Yakubu Kundi, Bishop of Kafanchan
4. Workers of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) observing the Ash Wednesday Black dress directive of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); during the celebration of Mass at St. Gabriel Chaplaincy, CSN, Durumi, Abuja

EDITORIAL/ PRODUCTION TEAM

Publisher - Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)

Editor-in-Chief - Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi (CSN Secretary General)

Editor - Rev. Fr. Chris N. Anyanwu

Deputy Editor - Otunba JideFadugba-Phinheiro

Reporters

Lucy Arogundade (Mrs)
Stephen Ofurum

Secretary

Fidelia Angbalaga

Production Officer

Emmanuel Eko

Published and Printed by the Directorate of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Durumi- Abuja

CONTACT:

Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN)
Plot 459, Cadastral Zone B2, Southern Parkway,
Durumi 1, Abuja
Lagos Office: 6, Force Road, Opp. Tafawa Balewa
Square, Lagos.

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The Word of God is Alive !



NIGERIA: Grappling with Fragile Peace and Unity without Justice!

The Nigerian nation is gradually moving towards the precinct of disintegration. With every new day, the country's fragile peace and unity continues to be threatened by acts of injustice and flagrant disrespect for the rule of law, due process; miscarriage of justice, unprecedented insecurity to life and property, ethnic chauvinism and other vices that make living almost impossible for majority of Nigerians.

Since the advent of this new democratic system pioneered by the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, in 1999; the country has been experiencing one major challenge or the other detrimental to the realization of the objectives of the principles of democracy; as obtained in other parts of the world. Today, Nigerians in all parts of the country live in palpable fear; as justice and equity are jettisoned, while decorum, respect for human dignity and life as well as service for the common good have been thrown to the winds.

From 1999 to date, the country had been governed by two major political parties, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). But both, in one way or the other, have failed to meet the aspirations of the people and tenets of democratic principles which hold justice, equity and service for the common good sacrosanct. Thus, since 2009, Nigeria has continued to wallow in socio-economic and political malaise.

In this edition, our lead cover story summarizes the situation of the Nigerian nation in the last two decades; and our verdict is: *It has been a case of heavy steam with much ado, but without any motion forward.* The story is titled: NIGERIA: Grappling with Fragile Peace and Unity without Justice.

"Black" Ash Wednesday of Solidarity

With spineless killing of innocent citizens by terrorist groups and bandits in different parts of the country; and the seeming nonchalance of Government at giving adequate protection to life and property of Nigerians in all parts of the country; The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), called on all the faithful in the country to embark on a solidarity sympathy Prayer Protest Procession on Ash Wednesday (February 26); wearing black in condolence and solidarity with the families of the victims of the atrocities of the Boko Haram terrorists, Fulani herdsmen and bandits ravaging the country. The response of the faithful was encouraging in all the Archdioceses and Dioceses in the country, on Sunday March 1, when the Bishops and the faithful of Abuja Diocese undertook a solidarity prayer protest procession from the Christian Centre, Central District to the Cathedral of Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral, Garki; it was a clarion call to all Nigerians to join hands and rescue our country Nigeria. Read more inside.

Catholic Bishops Warn of Ominous Signs

Some unpleasant and undemocratic tendencies that have characterized the present democratic process in the country since the advent of the present political dispensation portend great danger. In the last quarter of last year, the nation's apex legislative body embarked on an unwholesome "journey" of stifling freedom of expression and constructive criticism, with a Legislative Bill under the guise of controlling Fake News. However, some members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); like other patriotic Nigerians saw the move as an ill-wind that will blow no good to the people and the country. So, they warned of the ominous signs this attempt by the National Assembly portend. The warnings of the Bishops are the contents of our story with the above title.

Whither Freedom of Religion?

According to the Nigerian Constitution (as amended in 1999), Freedom of Religion is one of the primary principles of governance in the country. In other words, the country is a Secular State where freedom of Religion and choice of worship are held sacrosanct and binding in all parts of the country. But as a result of the Boko Haram insurgents and Fulani Herdsmen invaders' atrocities, Christians in different parts of the country have been subjected to various types of persecution in the name of Religion and attempted ethnic cleansing. The heinous crimes of these killers of joy have turned Nigeria to a country where sanctity of life is no longer sacrosanct. And to add salt to injury, Government's unequivocal deception of "having the situation under control" while the atrocities escalate, connote a tacit support for this murderous-row group. Read our second cover story for this first edition of your informative CSN News magazine for the year 2020, titled: *Killing with Impunity in the name of Religion.*

Missio Workshop on Peace and Dialogue

The collaboration between the German Bishops' Conference and its Nigerian counterpart through their various agencies got a boost this year when Missio Aachen of Germany, and the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) jointly organized a workshop at which experts from both countries had an academic discussion and experience sharing on the theme: *Peace and Interreligious Dialogue in the context of the theme of the 2020 Mission Sunday.* It was a two-day intensive discussion on the contentious issue of interreligious dialogue and peace, with special focus on the Nigerian situation as a case study. Read more under the title: Missio Conference: Addressing the challenges facing Nigeria.

Fourth National Mission Congress

In conformity with the directive of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, the Church in Nigeria joined the Universal Church in the celebration of the special Mission Month and Year of 2019, to mark the centenary anniversary of the Encyclical Maximum Illud written by Pope Benedict XV in 1919. The grand finale of the ceremony in Nigeria took place in Benin City, capital of Edo State. It was a successful and motivating prayer and academic gathering on the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the country; and was attended by over 350 delegates from all the Archdioceses and dioceses, as well as Religious Congregations in the country. The highlight of the programme

EDITORIAL

was the presence of the President of Pontifical Mission Societies Worldwide, Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, from the Vatican, at the closing ceremony; and the official recognition of the country's Blessed Michael Iwene Tansi and Vivian Ogu, the Virgin girl who refused to give up her virginity, in the face of persecution as potential saints, by the Universal Church. Read our interesting recap of this celebration in this edition.

Kaigama installed in Abuja; March 31st date for Audu

It was indeed a memorable ceremony as the former Local Ordinary of Abuja Archdiocese, John Cardinal Onaiyekan formally bowed out of his position as the head of the Catholic Church in Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, giving way to his successor, Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama to take over the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese. The impressive and colourful ceremony at which Archbishop Kaigama, was installed the Metropolitan of Abuja Ecclesiastical Province took place at the Twelve Apostles Cathedral Church, Kubwa on Thursday, December 5, 2019. We bring the concise report of this ceremony in this edition. Meanwhile, as Archbishop Kaigama takes over in Abuja Archdiocese, Most Rev. Matthew Audu, erstwhile Bishop of Lafia Diocese has been appointed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis to succeed him as the Chief Shepherd of Jos Archdiocese. With his installation scheduled for March 31st, 2020; Bishop Audu becomes the third Metropolitan of Jos Ecclesiastical Province.

Chikwe Becomes Owerri Auxiliary

It was celebration with joy and satisfaction, when on Thursday, December 12, 2019, the Catholic faithful of Owerri Archdiocese joined their Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Anthony J.V. Obinna to welcome dignitaries from all parts of the country to the

Episcopal ordination of Msgr. Moses Chikwe as the first Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese. In this edition, we bring you a summary account of this memorable event.

New Local Ordinaries for Aba and Kafanchan

Following the appointments of new Chief Shepherds for the dioceses of Aba and Kafanchan by the Holy Father, Pope Francis; the faithful of the two dioceses rolled out the drums and hosted many dignitaries from all parts of the country for the Episcopal ordinations and installations of their new Bishops. While Bishop Augustine Ndubueze Echema was ordained and installed in Aba on Thursday, February 13; Most Rev Julius Yakubu Kundi was ordained and installed as the Second Bishop of Kafanchan Diocese on February 20, 2020. We bring you reports of the two Episcopal ordinations in this edition of your spicy news magazine.

Our Regulars

Also, in this edition we bring you reports of the activities of the Church in the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country; the Church in Africa and Diaspora as well as the Vatican. Also featured are our regulars of the activities of all the departments of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN); and other agencies of the Bishops' Conference. It is a package you cannot resist to read repeatedly.

Wish you happy reading and a very successful 2020 in all your endeavours.

Rev. Fr. Dr. Chris Anyanwu
Editor



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NIGERIA: THE STORY OF WHITEWASHED TOMBS

The metaphor of Jesus' expression of whitewashed tombs in Matthew's Gospel 23: 27-28 is indeed the story of many Nigerians. It is all about decorating the outside while the inside stinks unbearably. The unbearable stink that is deliberately covered by the privileged few is precisely what has reduced Nigeria to what it is today. Nigeria has the population, the human and natural resources, all that it takes to join the league of developed nations, but doublespeak has become our culture and a cog in the wheel of progress.

There is doublespeak to government policies, to our sense of oneness, to our religious plurality, equality before the law, equal economic opportunities and many more that one can name. Everyone knows that when employment opportunities are advertised, especially in government Ministries and Parastatals, those shortlisted for the interview, very often, are meant just to demonstrate that best practices are followed. But those who get employed at the end of the day are those who do not undergo any interview. What qualifies such candidates for the jobs is that they know someone who knows somebody. The same thing goes for the Armed Forces and Para-Military organisations. The nobodies in society often suffer the rigours of strenuous exercises, just to demonstrate that the procedure for recruitment took place. Today, our electoral system takes the same format. The electorate is only used to show that election took place, but as to rely on their votes to count, it seems to be the prerogative of the Supreme Court to determine the winner in an election. Here also is the story of a whitewashed tomb.

We have come to create a culture of "connection," where things work not on merit, qualification or objectivity but because, of the person in the position to turn things around for the common good is connected to me in something traceable to consanguinity, friendship, ethnicity, region or village. For this reason, many Nigerians doublespeak and corruption becomes relative. A clear example can be given when the Supreme Court sacked the PDP Government in Imo State, APC party members were happy. Not so long, the Supreme Court nullified the election of an APC Governor-elect, who was about to be sworn into office, PDP members were jubilating all over the place. In each of the situation, both parties, when it happened to them, cried foul to the ruling of the Supreme Court. Could the parties not all denounce the ruling even when it favoured them? It is clearly a story of a whitewashed tomb.

Not unconnected with the stories of doublespeak actions and life is the reality of valuation of people based on one's religious belief. Talking about religious belief in Nigeria is, in fact, a convoluted story. Suffice it to say, especially for the northern part of Nigeria, that the Usman Dan Fodio jihad which subjugated many ethnic groups in northern Nigeria under Fulani rulership, who could only progress in life only when they embraced Islam. Both Fulani and Islam became something superior, a yardstick for class and progress. Since the era of subjugation had provided control and easy administration, the British colonialists cashed into the already existing system and introduced Indirect Rule, thereby empowering the Fulani Islamic administration. Since then, in northern Nigeria, it matters not the level of one's education, as long as one is not a Muslim, more so a Fulani, one is considered not worth more than a vulture. No matter how wretched Almajiri looks, he believes that he is worth more than a doctorate holder who is not a Muslim. Being a Muslim has been presented as equal to achieving personal integrity which conversely does not tolerate a belief system of a non-Muslim.

The system met on ground and further aided by the colonialists has

made the Muslim Fulani believe that they are superior to others, and therefore, have the right to do as they please.

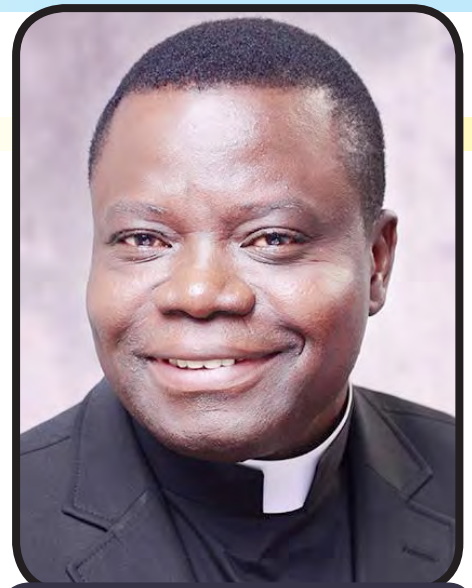
Other tribes automatically fall into the classification as minorities. The irritating thing is that in the north of Nigeria, especially, the

North East, where exists many tribes other than the Muslim Fulani, a non-Fulani and a non-Muslim knows that he or she is looked down upon, denigrated, and cheated, but can cry to nowhere. It feels like being beaten and yet one is asked not to cry. The point being made here is demonstrated by the way the Nigerian Constitution itself is crafted. At the last Constitutional Conference called by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2014, Bishop Joseph Bagobiri and Pastor Emmanuel Bosun made the point that "In the 1999 Constitution, Shariah was mentioned 73 times, Grand Khadi 54 times, Islam 28 times, Muslims 10 times and there is no single mention of Christ, Christian, Christianity or church. Some mischievous elements are taking these lapses in the constitution to come to the ungodly decision that probably the State is an Islamic state." Such is a true reflection of how most Muslims feel about who they are and their place in the geographical landmass called Nigeria.

The doublespeak in our country Nigeria has generated untold hatred and tension as well as created a dichotomy, mutual distrust between Muslims and Christians, northerners and southerners, Fulani and non-Fulani. Anyone who voices this out is thought of as not being politically correct. Being politically correct is priced above the objectivity that some group of people with their belief system are believed to be more important than the majority of Nigerians.

Given the many ills bedevilling our country which is yearning for justice and equality of opportunities, thoughts of Martin Luther King Jr come to mind here. According to him, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Our time in Nigeria at the moment is a challenging time given the level of insecurity in the land. Asking the government to wake up and defend its people, is a prophetic call. For to keep quiet in a moment such as we are in, is like what Martin Luther King Jr further says, "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it."

All is not lost, for I believe in what Anthony Giddens, the British Sociologist, who said that we are both the outcome and cause of our actions. Therefore, as agents, we have the agency to do otherwise. We can undo the doublespeak that has become our culture - a way of life in our country. Objectivity is the road map to the achievement of the common good, where the good of the other becomes the basis of our action.



Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi

Rev. Fr Zacharia Nyantiso Samjumi
Secretary-General.

CBCN 2019 SECOND PLENARY IN ABEOKUTA IN PICTURES



Some of the Priests in a procession into the Church for the opening Mass.



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze of Benin City, presiding at the opening Mass.



Cross section of the Bishops at the celebration of the opening Mass



Some of the Seminarians of St. Augustine Seminary at the celebration of the Mass.



Cross section of Ministers and other dignitaries at the opening Mass



Ladies of St. John International at the opening Mass.



Cross section of the lay faithful at the celebration of the Mass.



Some of the Priests of CSN in procession into the Church for the celebration of the Mass.

ABEOKUTA:

Cradle Of Christianity Hosts Catholic Bishops

Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun State, home of the ancient Olumo Rock, cradle of the Christian faith and home of the first Hospital in the country; hosted the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, for their Second Plenary Meeting for the year 2019, from September 11 to September 20, 2019. The ancient city noted for the making of native tie and dye Adire cloth was not only agog for hosting about 60 members of the Conference who came from all over the country, but also awash with prayers and blessings as it was hosting that big number of the Fathers of the Church for the first time since, the diocese was created 22 years ago.

The week-long ceremony started with the opening Mass at the diocesan Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul Itesi, Abeokuta; with the President of the Conference, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze presiding. It was attended by the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi; and dignitaries from all walks of life, including: Governor Dapo Abiodun of Ogun State; Ministers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Traditional rulers, led by the Alake of Egbaland, Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo; priests, religious and lay faithful from Abeokuta Diocese and other dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Lagos. The Opening Ceremony and other activities of the conference were held at the ultra-modern multi million Naira diocesan Pastoral Centre - Divine Mercy Pastoral Centre, Agbamaya, Obada Oko, Abeokuta, Ogun State.

In his homily at the opening ceremony, the host bishop, Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoynbo noted that the members of the Conference meet to sustain the evangelization mission of the Church and the faith of the people. According to him, the gathering of the Bishops is expected to give the ray of hope to the people of the country in the context of the present "deplorable, religious, social, economic, Intellectual, moral, medical realities and situations which we have created and found ourselves in Nigeria." He therefore admonished his brother Bishops to continue to be the strength and hope of the people and encourage them to remain steadfast in the faith, especially in times of challenges. Bishop Odetoynbo urged the government and the people to listen to the voice of reason, as contained in several documents of the Church.

In his address, the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi expressed satisfaction at the rotation of the Second Plenary of the Bishops Conferences among the dioceses noting: "This constitutes a sign of the fact that the Church is one spiritual family which is present in various parts of Nigeria, as well as in various parts of the entire world." He added: "From north to south. From west to east. Wherever there are Catholic communities, the Bishops may feel themselves at home and gather in order to pray, reflect, discuss and make decisions together."

While delivering the felicitations and blessings from the Holy Father Pope Francis, Archbishop Filipazzi noted that: "The Plenary Assembly of the Bishops' Conference is not merely a formal act nor a moment characterized by organizational matters, but it expresses that profound bond that unites the Bishops, Successors of the Apostles, and that must make them work together, not keeping in mind only the good of each one's own Dioceses, but also that of the dioceses of their brother Bishops, that of the entire Church in Nigeria and that of the whole Country, as well as the good of the universal Church."

In his speech at the opening ceremony, the President of the Conference, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze spoke on the fragile peace in the country, in spite of the challenges faced on



Most Rev. Peter Odetoynbo

different fronts and the love of God and how He has been protecting and providing for the people and the country. He however warned that God should not be taken for granted. His words: Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ who has always been protecting and providing for us Nigerians in a special way. When many people look at the situation we are in presently, they wonder why we still have the level of peace we have in our country. Many nations never had challenges as close to what we are presently experiencing and they are at war; war that has led to the deaths and destruction of many lives. We just know that God has been kind to us. God has been giving us many opportunities to get it right. If we do not get it right, I am afraid what are we going to tell God?"

Archbishop Akubeze also spoke on the need for justice and peace to sustain the Nigerian nation; the special celebration of the special Mission Month for the year 2019 and other activities of the Church since the first Plenary of the Conference for the year, held at the Catholic Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Durumi, Abuja. He commended the Bishop of Abeokuta Diocese, Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoynbo, Priests, Religious and lay faithful for providing a conducive atmosphere for the deliberations of the Bishops.

At the end of their deliberations on the state of the Church and the nation, the Bishops issued a communiqué in which they berated the country's political leaders for the retarded socio-economic and political development of the country. The communiqué was signed by Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, President of the Conference and Catholic Archbishop of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province and Most Rev. Camillus Umoh, Catholic Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese and National Secretary of the Conference.

(Next page is the full text of the Communiqué)

**READ AND SHARE THE
WORD OF GOD ALWAYS**

CBCN 2019 SECOND PLENARY IN ABEOKUTA IN PICTURES



The Chairperson of the ceremony, Prof. Mrs. Yemisi Eromosele addressing the guests.



Anthony Cardinal Okogie, Archbishop of Lagos (right), Archbishop Valerian Okeke of Onitsha and Lady Pauline Tallen, Minister of Women Affairs at the opening ceremony.



Rev. Sisters at the opening ceremony



Governor Dapo Abiodun of Ogun State addressing the guests.



Bishop Charles Hammawa of Jalingo speaking at the opening ceremony.



Cross section of dignitaries at the opening ceremony.



Some members of the high table at the opening ceremony



The Alake of Egba Land, Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo III, addressing guests at the opening ceremony.

MOVING BEYOND PRECARIOUS LIVING IN NIGERIA

at the Divine Mercy Pastoral Centre, Agbamaya, Obada-Oko, Abeokuta, Ogun State, 11-20 September 2019.)

1. PREAMBLE

We, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria held our Second Plenary Meeting for the year at the Divine Mercy Pastoral Centre, Agbamaya, Obada-Oko, Abeokuta, Ogun State from 11-20 September 2019. Having prayerfully reflected on issues affecting the Church and the Nigerian State, we now issue this Communiqué.

2. IN COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS

The Holy Father Pope Francis has come under attacks in recent times. Of more serious concern are the attacks coming from some higher levels of the Church in some parts of the world. As members of the Episcopal College, of which the Holy Father is the Head, we regard these attacks as the proverbial ill wind that blows no one any good, bearing in mind that there are other more legitimate and traditionally tested avenues of expressing our opinions to the Holy Father. To be able to lead the flock of Christ in the right direction in a world filled with many contradicting and confusing voices, we as a College must speak with one voice. We therefore recognise that "The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the Bishops and of the whole company of the faithful" (Vat II, Lumen Gentium 23). We reaffirm our faith in and commitment to the Pontificate of the Holy Father Pope Francis. Consequently, we pledge our loyalty and availability to him in the exercise of his Petrine office, and we promise to continue to cooperate with him fully in the discharge of his divine mandate as the Pastor of the Universal Church (cf. Code of Canon Law, Cann. 331, 334).

3. STATE OF THE NATION

i) Continued Insecurity and the Need for Respect for Human Life
There are, unfortunately, still many instances of killings as a result of banditry, kidnapping, assassination, armed robbery, reckless use of force by security agencies and lynching. Lately, too, there is an upsurge in the cases of suicide, even among our youths. Furthermore, the clashes between herdsmen and communities, and the activities of Boko Haram insurgents have continued, in which many innocent people lose their lives. These make living in Nigeria very precarious. We recognise the efforts being made by the government to fight insecurity in the land. However, we emphasise that a lot more still needs to be done in this regard. We pray for the peaceful repose of the victims and sympathise with the bereaved families. We reiterate that without adequate security of lives and property, there can be no stability and enabling environment for meaningful development. We observe that the Federal Government, in which the power to control the major security agencies is vested, is overwhelmed. There is, therefore, need for proper decentralization of these agencies for effective results. We call on all citizens to be law abiding and vigilant, be one another's keeper, live by sound moral principles and, above all, obey the commandments of God. We urge governments at all levels to provide the enabling environment that would make it possible for both the government and the private sector to create job opportunities for our teeming youth population. This would certainly minimise the menace of insecurity

in our land. We continue to urge the government and security agencies to do all they can to secure the immediate release of Leah Sharibu, the remaining Chibok girls and all the other persons still in captivity.

ii) Necessity for National Integration

We thank God for making it possible for our country to continue to exist as a sovereign nation. Yet, much effort is required from both government and citizens in order to have a nation in which everyone and every part, irrespective of differences of tribe or religion or political affiliation, will have a sense of belonging. We note with dismay that many months after the general elections, many parts of our nation are still in disarray. The country is badly divided. This is evident in appointments to positions of national importance, sharing of resources, and distribution of social amenities. We urge especially the Federal Government, to ensure that it does not allow ethnic or religious hegemony to prevail in our multi-religious and secular state. No one religion should be favoured over another. There should be fairness, justice and neutrality in relation to all religions and ethnic groups, for where there is no justice, there can be no peace, unity and development. We therefore enjoin all Nigerians to see themselves as one united people and work for justice in order to ensure a peaceful and united nation.

iii) Religion, Politics and Life

We are grateful to God that in these trying times, many Nigerians remain manifestly religious. Our practice of religion, however, seems to have little effect on our moral, socio-economic and political lives. While praying for solutions to our problems, we must endeavour to be just in our dealings with others, work hard in fulfilling our duties, and collaborate with others in the social transformation of our country. We observe that our democracy is derailing from what it should be. The qualities of accountability, transparency, independence of the judiciary, respect for fundamental



L-R: Alake of Egba Land, Oba Aremu Gbadebo Adedotun III, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, CSN Secretary General and Rev. Fr. Ukeme Bassey, Personal Assistant to the Secretary General, at the opening Mass.

rights, observance of the rule of law, and fair and credible electoral process, to mention only these, are still lacking. We therefore urge all politicians, businessmen, religious leaders, public servants and indeed all citizens to live out the values of their faith for the common good. To all of us we address the challenge of our Lord Jesus Christ: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 13-14).

4. XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA

We denounce the horrendous xenophobic attacks in South Africa in which many non-nationals, including Nigerians, lost their lives and/or have their property looted and/or forced to flee the country for their dear lives. We condemn the unfortunate reprisals on perceived South African investments in some part of Nigeria, as two wrongs do not make a right! We pray for the peaceful repose of those who lost their lives and sympathise with those who have suffered bereavement, injuries and heavy losses. We commend the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) for being prophetic in their condemnation of the attacks and urging the government to take decisive steps to end them. We join our brother Bishops in vehemently condemning the attacks and with them draw the attention of all nations to Deuteronomy 10:18: "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing." At the same time, we note that South Africa and Nigeria have come a long way in fraternal and diplomatic relations. We advise Nigerians living at home and abroad to be good and law abiding.

5. THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

Marriage, the sacred and inviolable union between one man and one woman, is under pressure throughout the world. In our country, this pressure has been increased by the economic and social crises that have lasted for several years. As a result, many a family is no longer stable enough to fulfill the traditional roles of the family in the Church and in the society. We therefore reiterate that the family, as the cradle of life and development, needs to be helped to rediscover as well as to cherish its divine mandate as the first school of virtues and values. Parents are called upon to, by their words and examples, uphold the ideals of decency, discipline, honesty and marital fidelity. The pursuit of wealth and 'success' must be guided by those values if families are to bequeath to the wider society responsible young people, who cherish hard work and merit, who respect elders, value the sacredness of life, the sanctity of the sacrament of marriage and are willing to honestly contribute to the building of the nation and the growth of the Church. Parents are also enjoined to keep vigilance over their children and wards, in order to provide moral guidance and protection from unhealthy influences, sexual deviance and exploitation. In spite of present economic challenges, we urge the members of families never to throw away the important African and Christian values of respect and care for the elderly.

6. A CALL ON THE PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

In union with the Holy Father Pope Francis, we thank and encourage those priests and religious who continue to put themselves at risk in serving the people of God and giving themselves up unreservedly, never to give up. However, we also insist that the times call for holiness of life and more sacrifice on the part of all priests and religious if we are to be true to our vocations. All priests and religious must exercise discretion and be committed to a life of simplicity that is consistent with the life of the Master, who had nowhere to lay his head (cf. Lk 9:57-58). An ostentatious and materialistic life of luxury draws unnecessary attention and portends counter witnessing.

We also enjoin all priests and religious to have a healthy relationship with young people and do more to inculcate the faith in them. Altar servers, members of the Association of the Holy Childhood, teenagers, members of Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), Young Catholic Students (YCS), Nigeria Federation of Catholic Students (NFCS) and others, need faith mentoring to ensure a fruitful future for the Church. All forms of abuse of minors and vulnerable adults are to be abhorred, since they are a betrayal not only of the confidence our people repose in us but also of our vocations and ministry as priests and religious.

7. EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

This year marks the centenary celebration of the Apostolic Letter of Pope

Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, on the Church's missionary role, issued on 30 November 1919. To mark the celebration, Pope Francis has drawn the attention of the entire Church to the Extraordinary Mission Month of October 2019. This month serves as a momentous opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the missionary mandate of Christ, to assess the effectiveness of our response to this mandate, to reignite our zeal for the mission, and provide prayerful support for missionary efforts all over the Catholic world.

The International Young Catholic Students (IYCS) held their World Council meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, from 30 August to 10 September 2019 with the theme: "Taking Action for Peace, Here and Now."

The Golden Jubilee of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) was celebrated in Kampala, Uganda, 19-29 July 2019. The Conferences of Africa and Madagascar were represented. The Jubilee celebration provided a significant opportunity for the Church in Africa to evaluate her evangelizing strategy and effectiveness of her becoming Family of God in the true and rich sense.

The third Plenary Assembly of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOWA) was held in Ouagadougou 13-20 May 2019. Thirty-four Nigerian Bishops were in attendance. The Assembly called on the governments and civil authorities in the West Africa region to pay more attention and commit more resources to the development of the youths. The next Plenary Assembly comes up in the year 2022 and will be hosted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). We take this opportunity to congratulate Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, the Co-adjutor Archbishop of Abuja and the Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese, on his re-election as the President of RECOWA.

We congratulate the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Abuja, Benin City, Calabar, Ibadan, Jos and Owerri for celebrating the 25th Anniversary of their erection this year. May the Church of Christ continue to flourish in our land. Amen. We thank God for the increase in the number of Bishops in Nigeria. Most Rev. Francis Obafemi Adesina, the Bishop of Ijebu Ode Diocese, was ordained on 25 April 2019. Most Rev. Patrick Eluke, the Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese, was also ordained on 9 May 2019. We wish Most Rev. Albert Fasina, the Bishop Emeritus of Ijebu Ode Diocese, a happy retirement and thank him for his services. We thank God for Most Rev. Paul Olawoore who on 12 July 2019 officially assumed office as the substantive Bishop of Ilorin Diocese. We rejoice with and thank Most Rev. Ayo Maria Atoyebi, OP, the Bishop Emeritus of the same Diocese for his stewardship. We regret the death of Most Rev. Kevin Joseph Aje, the Bishop Emeritus of Sokoto Diocese, who died on 27 May 2019 and has since been buried. We condole with the Bishop, Priests and the Laity of Sokoto Diocese and pray God to grant his servant eternal rest.

We equally congratulate the Dioceses of Maiduguri and Ijebu Ode on their epoch-making achievements. The Diocese of Maiduguri dedicated her St. Patrick's Cathedral on 10 July 2019. Ijebu Ode Diocese celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her canonical erection as a Diocese on 18 July 2019.

8. CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

The Nigerian State is much endowed with natural, human and spiritual resources. Sadly, political authorities have not been completely diligent in relating to these resources neither have they been fair and equitable in distributing them. Justice requires them to give everyone their due, from sharing of resources to caring for the human person. Where there is no fair sharing of wealth and opportunities, there is bound to be crisis. It is only when we have justice that we can have true peace and sustainable development. We enjoin all Christians and people of good will to preach daily this message of justice and peace, and to live it out coherently. May the Blessed Virgin Mary our Mother, the Queen of Peace and Patroness of Nigeria intercede for us.

Most Rev. Augustine Obiora AKUBEZE
President, CBCN/Archbishop of Benin City

Most Rev. Camillus Raymond UMOH
Secretary, CBCN/Bishop of Ikot-Ekpene

CBCN 2019 SECOND PLENARY IN ABEOKUTA IN PICTURES



Alake of Egba Land Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo III, welcoming the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Filipazzi to his Palace when he hosted the Bishops.



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze in a warm handshake with the Alake of Egba Land



Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo III, welcoming CBCN Vice President, Bishop Lucius Ugorji to the Palace.



Prayer time before the banquet L - R: Bishop Lucius Ugorji, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze, Archbishop Antonio Filipazzi and the Alake of Egba Land, Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo III.



Cross section of the Bishops during the reception at the Palace of the Alake of Egba Land



The Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi (left) and John Cardinal Onaiyekan (right) accompanying Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama to his Cathedral.

Change of Leadership Baton in Abuja ...As Onaiyekan hands over to Kaigama

It was indeed a celebration of joy for the Catholic faithful of Abuja Archdiocese, when the crème of the society from different parts of the country gathered at the Twelve Apostles Cathedral, Kubwa, to witness and celebrate the installation of Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama as their new Chief Shepherd. He succeeded the former incumbent, John Cardinal Onaiyekan who retired in December last year after reaching the canonical retirement age of 75 years as required by the Vatican.

Present at the ceremony were: Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi; members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), led by its President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze; priests, religious, lay faithful and representatives of the Christian Association of Nigeria CAN; Christian and Moslem leaders from different parts of the country, State Governors and traditional rulers including the Jukun Supreme leader, His Majesty, The Aku Uka of Wukari, Dr. Shekarau Angyu Masa-Ibi, Kuyvon II and the traditional ruler of Jujun Kona land, His Royal Highness, Augustine Njeenmang Vengkani. The ceremony was presided over by John Cardinal Onaiyekan, while Archbishop Valerian Okeke of Onitsha Archdiocese preached the homily.

Dignitaries at the ceremony were led by the Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osibajo who represented President Muhammadu Buhari and presented a personal message from the President. Also present was Archbishop Bonaventure Kwofie of Accra, Ghana; who represented Philippe Cardinal Quedraogo, the Archbishop of Ouagadougou and President of the Symposium for the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM); and presented a congratulatory message, on his behalf.

In his homily titled: Feed My Lambs, Tend My Sheep; Archbishop Valerian Okeke spoke extensively on the life and ministry of a Bishop, the uniqueness of Abuja Archdiocese and the Abuja Ecclesiastical Province and gave a profile of the new local ordinary of the Archdiocese stressing: "There is no iota of doubt that by God's design, he has gone through the crucible of leadership, spiritual formation, cognate experience and exposure, and God has all these years prepared him to be where he is today."

The homilist advised the new Metropolitan: "All Nigerians must find a home in your pastoral sphere, your brother Bishops, Christians, Moslems, Traditional worshippers etc. all are your children and to be true to the world that is God's property and family, you must extend this welcome beyond the immediate bounds of the Church, to ensure that all the children of God find a home first in your church, and then by extension in the wider Abuja and Nigerian society."

Speaking at the ceremony, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and the Metropolitan of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze stated that God has always blessed Abuja Archdiocese and has again given it another Archbishop of outstanding quality. He went down memory lane on how the See has been fortunate to have been shepherded by two cardinals, connoting the special love of the Holy Father for the Archdiocese. He spoke on the lives of the new Archbishop and his predecessor expressing the hope that: "Abuja may one day become a Cardinal Seat, whereby anyone appointed to the See will eventually be appointed a Cardinal."

Pointing out that Archbishop Kaigama is stepping into another Ecclesiastical Office and not the shoes of Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop Akubeze noted that individual diversity is a unique gift of God, hence, it is not appropriate to make comparative analysis of the administrative capability of one bishop with another. He added: "We have different world views. We have diverse theological opinions, diverse liturgical opinions, diverse political views. Kaigama must not try to be Cardinal Onaiyekan because God created him uniquely to be who he is."

Calling on the priests, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese to cooperate and collaborate with their new Chief Shepherd, the CBCN President described Archbishop Kaigama as a trusted and tested leader of high quality, spiritually and pastorally; with strong passion for social justice. He called on the new local ordinary to, among other things, remain a source of unity for the diverse groups in Abuja.

In his own speech, Archbishop Kaigama gave gratitude to God and to all who have helped in making the day a great day; as well as all who have assisted him with their prayers and presence. Why commending the zeal and courage of his predecessor for leading the Archdiocese for nearly three decades, Archbishop Kaigama noted that his elevation was not a promotion for world things but a spiritual and pastoral duty on a higher pedestal. While outlining his agenda for continuing the good works of the cardinal, the new local ordinary solicited for the cooperation of the faithful of the Archdiocese.

ARCHBISHOP KAIGAMA'S INSTALLATION IN ABUJA IN PICTURES



The Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi displaying the Papal Bill of Authority for the installation of Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama to the congregation.



John Cardinal Onaiyekan (First right) discussing with his successor, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama and others.



Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama being congratulated by one of the oldest Priests of the Archdiocese.



Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama and the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi.



The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Anthony Filipazzi congratulating Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama on his installation



Brother Bishops congratulating Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama

Archbishop Kaigama also used the occasion to call on the country's political leaders and office holders to use their positions and offices for the common good; and "be faithful to the words of their oath of office; to serve rather than be served; to be closer to their people not only during election times, but to always feel their pain and agony rather than being tucked away in air-conditioned offices or travelling in jets and helicopters to avoid the deplorable roads that are left unmaintained for years or just simply poorly built."



Cross section of the Bishops at the ceremony. Third from right is the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Filipazzi, while next to him is John Cardinal Onaiyekan

The Episcopal ordination of Msgr. Moses Chikwe as the Auxiliary Bishop of Owerri Archdiocese was a celebration that will linger-on for a very long time in the memories of most of the faithful of the Archdiocese. Among other reasons, it is the first time the Archdiocese is having an Auxiliary to the incumbent Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Anthony J.V. Obinna. Therefore, there was every reason for the local ordinary and his flock to rejoice and celebrate. The two-day celebration started on the evening of Wednesday, December 11, 2019; with a cultural evening at the Odenigbo Pavilion, Maria Assumpta Cathedral, Owerri, capital of Imo State. The following day, Thursday, December 12, the premises of the Maria Assumpta Cathedral was filled to capacity when dignitaries from all walks of life joined the local ordinary of the Archdiocese, Most Rev. Anthony J.V. Obinna and his faithful to celebrate the historic Episcopal ordination of Msgr. Moses Chikwe as the first Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese. The ceremony was presided over by Archbishop Obinna who was also the principal consecrator while the homily was delivered by Bishop Lucius Ugorji, the Vice President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and local ordinary of Umuahia Diocese.

In his homily, Bishop Ugorji noted that in the present circumstances of challenges facing the country, the voice of the Bishop must be tireless and strong in the condemnation of evil and injustice. His words: "He must be a tireless voice that speaks of peace and reconciliation; a tireless voice that upholds authentic gospel values and sound Christian traditions and seek to preserve the deposit of faith in its purity and integrity".

The Local Ordinary of Umuahia, who is also the Apostolic Administrator of Ahiara Diocese regretted that in Nigeria today, "There are some charlatans masquerading as pastors; they preach a prosperity gospel devoid of the cross, hawk miracles, propagate primitive superstitions and encourage malice and vengeance."

Speaking on the political and socio-economic situation of the country, the homilist took a swipe at the level of poverty and derivation in the country saying: "Our country Nigeria, is fast losing its very soul to a growing culture of selfishness, greed and graft. This is a country where millions are wounded by poverty and reduced to a life of wanton suffering on account of endemic corruption".

Bishop Ugorji also used the occasion to educate the people on the enormity of the work of the office of the bishop and the inordinate ambition of some people to become bishops without the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He said: "Despite the onerous responsibilities of the episcopal office, some priests are tempted to aspire to be bishops and some even tend to consider themselves the best and brightest to be appointed, while forgetting that those who have the mitre in their head, never have it on their head. Often, it is those who have no ambition to be bishops that are appointed".

The bishop added that some folks even want their relations and friends to become bishops for reasons of prestige, rather than for the highly demanding selfless service of the office. He urged the new Bishop to preach Jesus Christ zealously and without embarrassment, as well as defend the Catholic Church with his life and suffer for his people without counting the cost.

In his address during the Mass, the Papal Nuncio, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi, thanked God for the new addition to the Bishops' Conference of Nigeria stressing that the Episcopal ordination of the new auxiliary bishop will add to the momentum of evangelizations already visible in Owerri Archdiocese.



Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna walking with his Auxiliary, Most Rev. Moses Chikwe after the Episcopal ordination of Bishop Chikwe

Owerri rejoices as First Auxiliary Bishop is Ordained

Also speaking at the event, the former Governor of Imo State, Honourable Emeka Ihedioha urged the new bishop to study and imbibe the Archbishop's modus operandi, so as to be able to lead the people beautifully, like Archbishop Obinna. While commending Archbishop Obinna for "fearlessly speaking out when matters of public interest were at stake", the Governor also opined that understanding or under studying the Archbishop was a huge task.

The ceremony was attended by about 20 members of the CBCN, led by its president, Most Rev Augustine Obiora Akubueze, the Archbishop of Benin City. Others included: Most Rev. Augustine Ukwuoma of Orlu, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji of Umuahia and Ahiara and Most Rev. Solomon Amatu of Okigwe Diocese. Also in attendance were: over 1,000 priests, religious and seminarians; Knights of the Church and lay faithful from different parts of the Ecclesiastical Province and dignitaries from all walks of life. The ceremony was rounded up with a civic reception at the Odenigbo Pavilion.

Born on April 3, 1967, Most Rev Moses Chikwe is the last of the ten children of late Mr. Moses Nwamadi Chikwe and Mrs. Anthonia Nwaobiara Chikwe of Umuehihie Uzoagba in Ikeduru LGA, Imo State.

On July 6, 1996, he was ordained a Catholic priest along with eight others at the Maria Assumpta Cathedral, Owerri by Archbishop Anthony A.J.V Obinna. For him, it was like a dream fulfilled; a dream he nurtured with passion for fifteen years. His father's death in 1994 two years before his ordination, thought a big test of his faith, it did not truncate his passion for the priesthood.

After his ordination in 1996, his first posting was at Holy Cross parish, Emii, as the associate of Fr. John Ibe. The next pastoral assignment was to be an associate at St. Columba's parish, Amaimo from February 1997 – January 1998. He worked under Fr. Bartholomew Okere. Then thereafter, he was was posted to Assumpta Press and The Leader Newspaper, as the assistant director under Fr. Raphael Madu, from February 1998 – August 2002. At Assumpta Press he was the longest serving assistant director and was given Distinguished Service Award. On the 17th October 2019, His Holiness Pope Francis appointed Msgr. Moses Chikwe the Auxiliary Bishop of Owerri Archdiocese, assigning him the Titular See of Flumenzer.

ORDINATION OF BISHOP MOSES CHIKWE IN OWERRI



The ordaining Prelate, Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna praying for the Bishop- elect (prostrated)



Archbishop Obinna putting the Mitre on the new Bishop. Left is Bishop Lucius Ugorji Of Umuahia.



The placing of the Holy Book on the Bishop-elect.



Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna embracing his Auxilliary after the ordination of the latter.



Archbishop Obinna blessing the Bishop-elect flanked by Bishop Lucius Ugorji (left) and Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu (right)



CBCN Vice President and Bishop of Umuahia, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji addressing guests at the opening ceremony



The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi placing his hand on the head of the Bishop-elect



Group photograph of the Bishops present at the ceremony (5th from left is Bishop Moses Chikwe)

Aba Diocese celebrates installation of Bishop Echema



Most Rev. Augustine Echema

For the Catholic faithful of Aba Diocese, Thursday February 13, 2020, will remain a memorable day in the annals of the diocese as they trooped out in large numbers to host dignitaries from all parts of the country, for the Episcopal ordination and installation of their new local ordinary, Most Rev. Professor Augustine Ndubueze Echema; at the Christ the King Cathedral, Aba, Abia State. It was indeed a celebration of God's answer to their prayers after a long wait of four years, after the demise of the former local ordinary Bishops, Priests, religious, laity, government officials, traditional rulers and people of different walks of life, had Most Rev. Antonio Guido Fillipazi, the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, as the Principal Celebrant, Consecrator and homilist. He was assisted by Most Rev. Anthony J.V.Obinna, Archbishop of Owerri and the Metropolitan of Owerri Ecclesiastical Province, and Most Rev. Fortunatus Nwachukwu, the Apostolic Nuncio to Trinidad and Tobago, as Co- Consecrators at the Mass. In his homily at the Mass, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Fillipazi, noted that the joy of Aba diocese is now complete with the ordination of Bishop Echema. According to him, the diocese has waited for a long period of five years before the appointment of a new Bishop. "Five years after the demise of Bishop Vincent Valentine Egwuchukwu Ezeonyia C.S.S., the diocese has been left without a shepherd until now." He said. He stated that there is every reason for everyone in Aba to rejoice and be happy following "the admonition of the Apostle Paul: Rejoice in the Lord (Phil 4:4)," He however, cautioned that the joy associated with the appointment of a new bishop must not be for the wrong reason. According to him, "there may be those among us who rejoice for the appointment of the new Bishop of Aba for purely human or even wrong reasons. It would be so, for example, if we rejoice because the new Bishop is the "son of the soil" and consider his appointment as the victory of anybody, let

alone those who live and work in the church based on the criteria of geographical origin, or mere ethnical political or only for selfish interest. Also for this reason, the joy for this ordination must not make us forget the need of conversion from those ways of thinking and acting within the Church which are merely human or wrong and have created so many difficulties and sufferings in the diocese, in the Ecclesiastical Province and in the Church in Nigeria and even in the relationship with the Holy Father and the Holy See."

The Papal Nuncio used the occasion to express his gratitude to Very Rev. Fr. Innocent O. Ajuomo who for five years carried out the difficult task of been the Diocesan Administrator of Aba diocese.

Speaking on behalf of the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Augustine Akubueze, the Vice President of the conference, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji who is also the Bishop of Umuahia, expressed gratitude to the Holy Father Pope Francis for his pastoral solitude over the Church in Nigeria with the appointments of Bishops in the country. "Last December we witnessed the Ordination of Most Rev Moses Chikwe, the Auxilliary Bishop of Owerri. Today, we have just had the Ordination and installation of Most Rev. Augustine Echema as the Bishop of Aba. Next week, we shall be in Kafanchan for the ordination of Rev Msgr. Julius Yakubu Kundi, the Bishop-Elect of Kafanchan." He noted.

He felicitated with the new Bishop and welcomed him officially into the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. While commending the priests, religious and lay faithful of Aba Diocese for the warm welcome they have accorded their new bishop, the CBCN Vice President advised them to cooperate and work together with him so that they can achieve the pastoral objectives of the Diocese. "Given the immense human and material resources of your Diocese, you can achieve so much results, but you can do so only when you work as a united team, with each playing his or her role with commitment and fidelity," he concluded.

Present at the occasion was a high powered delegation of Abia State Government led by Dr. Okezie Ikpeazu, the Governor of Abia State and his Deputy Rt. Hon Ude Oko Chukwu. .

Born on December 28, 1958 in OhuhuNsulu, then Diocese of Umuahia and now of Aba Diocese; was until his appointment a clergy of Owerri Archdiocese and Professor of Liturgy in the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. He was ordained a priest on August 16, 1986, for the Owerri clergy.

After ordination he held the following positions: 1986-1988: Formator in the minor seminary St. Peter Claver in Okpala; 1988-1989: Parish priest of St. Mark in UmunekeNgor; 1989-1994: Higher studies in Frankfurt, Germany; 1994-1995: Parish priest of St. Joseph in Schwalbach, in the Diocese of Limburg, Germany; 1996-1998: Deputy Chaplain of the CIWA Worshipping Community in Port Harcourt. Since 1996: Professor of Liturgy at the Catholic Institute of West Africa in Port Harcourt; President of the Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Owerri; Chaplain of the Owerri Provincial

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF BISHOP ECHEMA IN ABA IN PICTURES



The Bishops in procession into the Church for the ceremony



The ordaining Prelate, Archbishop Antonio Fillipazzi putting the Skull cap on the head of the new bishop



The Bishop-elect, Msgr. Augustine Echema before the ordaining Prelate, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi flanked by Archbishop Anthony J. V. Obinna of Owerri (left) and Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Papal Nuncio to Suriname and Antiles.



Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi putting the Mitre on the head of the new Bishop



The ordaining Prelate placing the Holy Book on the head of the new Bishop



Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi handing over the Crosier to the new Bishop.



Bishop Augustine Ukwuoma of Orlu Diocese placing his hands on the head of the new Bishop



CBCN Vice President, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji of Umuahia congratulating the new Bishop.

KAFANCHAN DIOCESE CELEBRATES AS BISHOP KUNDI IS INSTALLED

It was unlimited joy with gratitude to God for the faithful of Kafanchan Diocese, when on Thursday, February 20, they were joined by a powerful delegation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) led by its President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze of Benin Archdiocese, dignitaries from all walks of life, Catholics and well-wishers from different parts of the country, to celebrate the Episcopal ordination and installation of their second local ordinary, Most Rev. Julius Yakubu Kundi. The ceremony took place at the New Kafanchan Township Stadium, with the Apostolic Nuncio, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi presiding. He also delivered the homily, while the CBCN President welcomed the new Bishop to the Conference, stating that, bishops are consecrated to lead the people of God after the heart of Christ. Archbishop Akubeze also used the occasion to reinstate how much the Conference missed the prophetic voice of Late Bishop Joseph Dalami Bagobiri, the first Bishop of Kafanchan who died two years ago. "We must note here, how much we do miss the prophetic voice of Late Bishop Joseph Dalami Bagobiri... He was a man who spoke out of conviction. You may not always agree with his positions but you would never fault his passion to fight for what he believed was right and to fight against what he believed was unjust." He noted. The CBCN President who is also the Archbishop of Benin city, gave some words of advice to the newly ordained bishop. "Bishop Kundi, as you assume office, we wish you good luck and success. As brother Bishop, know that we your brother Bishops are always there to help you. If you have any serious pastoral challenges you can consult any of us for help. As it is often said, one who always asks for direction will never miss his or her destination. A very good listening disposition is helpful in administration and governance. We leaders in the church must learn to listen to the voice of our people. Leaders who only speak and do not listen will at no distant time miss their way." He advised.

In his homily at the Mass, the Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev Antonio Guido Filipazzi who thanked the former Diocesan Administrator of Kafanchan Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Abba Biliyock for holding the diocese together, stated that "the ordination of a new Bishop helps us to be more aware what the Church really is, of whom we are children and members, so that we can learn to love and serve her ever better."

While noting that "the church should never be considered a reality that we can change at will in her doctrine, worship and action", the Nuncio who also was the Principal Consecrator at the Mass, warned that "no one-whether he be bishop, priest, religious or lay person-can live and act in the Church with the mentality of disposing freely, following the purely human ideas, fashions or tastes, instead of carrying out the will of the Divine Founder of the Church! Neither the Bishop nor anyone else should consider themselves "lords" of the Church, whose only Lord is her Divine Spouse." He warned.

In his vote of thanks, the new Bishop of Kafanchan Most Rev Julius Yakubu Kundi while thanking the Bishops, priests, religious, lay faithful and everyone for their good will messages, acknowledged the feeling of inadequacy for the tasks ahead of him as the new shepherd of the Diocese. He however promised to do his best to move the diocese forward. "We shall forever remain grateful for

all the sacrifices and the numerous accomplishments recorded for the church and the southern Kaduna people...my journey as a Bishop is to offer you love, encouragement, hope, vision and spiritual empowerment so that you can live better lives in dignity, peace and prosperity.

I am your spiritual leader, and therefore, I want to act in that respect and give you my support in so far as your intentions are for peace and harmony among people of different tribes, languages and different religions. I am the father of all and lover of all men and women desirous of peace and progress. This is why I will be very much open to dialogue with everyone and every religion in this zone." He said.

The ceremony which was well attended by Bishops, Priests, Religious, Lay faithful of Kafanchan Diocese had also in attendance many Dignitaries of both Church and State and Traditional rulers. Prominent among them was John Cardinal Onaiyekan, the Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja, Mr. Boss Mustafa, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and the Minister of Women Affairs Dame Mrs. Pauline Tallen.



Most Rev. Julius Yakubu Kundi, blessing the congregation.

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF BISHOP KUNDI IN KAFANCHAN



Msgr. Julius Yakubu Kundi in the procession to the altar for the celebration of the Mass and his Episcopal Ordination and installation.



The new Bishop after receiving the Mitre from the ordaining prelate, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi



The Bishop-elect kneeling before the ordaining prelate for prayer



Cross section of the faithful present at the Kafanchan Township Stadium to witness the ordination ceremony.



The placing of the Holy Book on the head of the Bishop-elect.



L- R: Bishop Martin Uzoukwu of Minna; Archbishop Joseph Ekwem of Calabar; Bishop Julius Yakubu Kundi of Kafanchan; Bishop Earnest Obodo, Auxiliary of Enugu and Bishop Hilary Dachelem of Bauchi



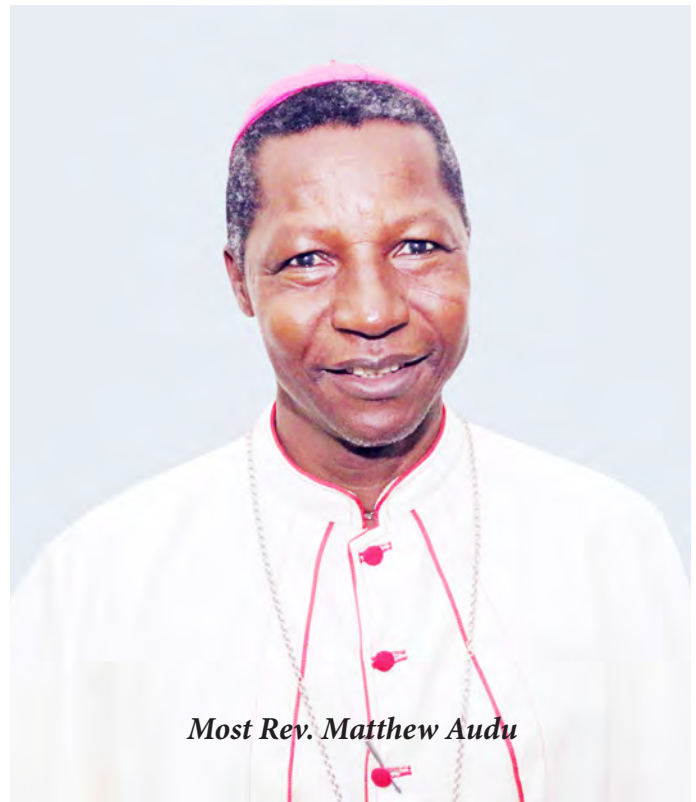
Cross section of priests and Knights of the Church at the Episcopal ordination ceremony.

March Date for Bishop Audu

On March 31, the desire of the faithful of Jos Archdiocese to have a new Archbishop will be realized, as their new local ordinary, Most Rev. Matthew Audu, will be installed as the third Archbishop of the Archdiocese, at the Divine Mercy Catholic Cathedral, Jos, Plateau State. He succeeds Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, the former incumbent, who on December 5, 2019, was installed the Archbishop of Abuja Archdiocese; following the retirement of John Cardinal Onaiyekan, on reaching the canonical age of 75.

Until his elevation by the Holy Father, Pope Francis on January 7, Bishop Audu was the Bishop of Lafia Diocese; where he has been the chief Shepherd of Christ's flock for 19 years. The CSN News magazine gathered that all hands are on deck to make the installation day memorable, as a powerful committee has been put in place to make necessary arrangements for the ceremony. It is also expected that a powerful delegation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), led by its President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze will be at the ceremony.

Meanwhile, the Holy Father, Pope Francis has appointed the Bishop of Gboko Diocese as the Apostolic Administrator of Lafia Diocese, to supervise the activities of the diocese, until the appointment of a new local ordinary to shepherd the diocese.



Most Rev. Matthew Audu

LATE BISHOP ADOBOH TO BE BURIED ON MARCH 11.



Late Most Rev. Peter Iornzuul Adoboh

The remains of the first Catholic Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese, Most Rev. Peter Iornzuul Adoboh will be committed to mother earth on Wednesday March 11, this year; according to a release made available to CSN

News magazine. According to the programme, a wake-keep of songs and prayer with Mass will take place on Tuesday, March 10, while the funeral Mass and the final commendation will take place on Wednesday. Followed by internment at the Catholic Cathedral Church of St. Gerald.

Born on April 14, 1958, late Bishop Peter Adoboh was ordained a priest of Makurdi Diocese on June 30, 1984. On the erection of the Catholic Diocese of Katsina-Ala by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on December 29, 2012; the deceased was appointed its first Bishop. He was ordained and installed as Bishop of the diocese on February 23, 2013. He died on February 14 at the Daughters of Charity Hospital, Abuja at the age of 61, after a protracted illness.

In a tribute to the late bishop, Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State stated: "The demise of Bishop Adoboh is painful, not only to the Catholic Church but Benue State at large. The late Bishop was a true servant of God who stood for peace and worked tirelessly to win souls for Christ. I recall the pivotal role Bishop Adoboh played towards the success of the state Government's amnesty programme which led to the recovery of thousands of weapons and hundreds of youths embracing the initiative, among several other efforts the Bishop made to ensure the restoration of peace and security to Sankera area of the state in particular."

Cover Story

Nigeria:

Grappling With Fragile Peace And Unity Without Justice!



Lord Lugard

By Otunba Jide Fadugba-Pinheiro



Chief Obafemi Awolowo



Sir Ahmadu Bello



Sir (Dr) Nnamdi Azikiwe

Introduction

Since she became an independent nation, 59 years ago; Nigeria has existed on a fragile peace and unity occasioned by the amalgamation of the three major tribes of Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba in 1914 by the British colonial masters. Even the civil war of July 6, 1967 to 15th January, 1970; stirred by the secession attempt of late elder statesman, Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu (then a military officer of the Eastern region origin), who tried to pull the Ibos out of the forced amalgamation only rattled the fragile unity. Also, the over three decades of undemocratic governance by the country's Military could not truncate the unholy union, which became 100 years old during the tenure of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in January 1, 2014. However, circumstances in the present day Nigeria point towards the peace and unity of the country moving towards a breaking point, as a result of some actions and inactions of the Federal government that are gravely affecting the very foundations of the country's unity and peace.

Speaking at the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), in Abeokuta, Ogun State, September last year, the President of the Conference and Archbishop of Benin City Archdiocese, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze aptly described the Nigerian situation as the kindness of God. His words: *"When many people look at the situation we are in presently, they wonder why we still have the level of peace we have in our country. Many nations never had challenges as close to what we are presently experiencing and they are at war; war that has led to the deaths and destruction of many lives. We just know that God has been kind to us. God has been giving us many opportunities to get it right. If we do not get it right, I am afraid what are we going to tell God?"*

Since the advent of the present democratic dispensation which began in 1999, this fragile peace and unity has experienced susceptible threats and the country has been in the doldrums of grappling with the process of civilized democracy. Although, she has succeeded in curtailing the regular hearing of Marshal Music on the country's Television and Radio Stations and prevented Military Coups; the democratic process of the last two decades in the country has been anything but for the common good which is the hallmark of democracy practiced in the civilized countries of the world. The country's political leaders have continued to make governance a peculiar design for personal purposes instead of for the service of the people.

The emeritus Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, aptly summarized the democratic process of the country in the last two decades as *"rig-mar- owing for the past two*

decades; making no appreciable progress forward in essential facets of life". The Cardinal was addressing the media in Abuja last year on the occasion of his 75th birthday celebration. With every new day, Nigeria's fragile peace and unity continued to be threatened; while injustice, disregard for rule of law, due process and protection of life and property have become alien to the corridor of power.

This palpable fear is further confirmed by the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah who in his 2019 Christmas/ New Year message titled: *As the Rainbow Recedes; declared: "These are very troubling times for our great country. As our promised rainbow of unity recedes and the nation seemingly falls into the throes of binary rapture, we must appeal to our instincts of self- restraint as to rescue our nation from the gathering storms of frustration, self-doubt and despondency"*

Also, in another statement issued last year and titled: *Social Media Bill: Short Walk to Totalitarianism?* Bishop Kukah averred: *"I have consistently tried to create levels of differentiation between democracy and dictatorship, especially dictatorships of the military variant as we have had in Nigeria. I have argued that Nigeria is still very far from the goal posts of what could be called a democratic society. In my view, the environment does not as yet look anything democratic because the actors are largely strangers to the ethos of and what is more, too many of them are tied to the old order, not to talk of the fact that the presence of General-presidents suggests that we are still in the thrall of militarism."*

The bishop is not far from the truth when one considers the fact that the country's present political climate is dominated and commanded by retired military officers who after tasting power during the long military rule period; "shredded" their Khaki uniform and donned Agbada and Babariga native dresses to continue the ruling power game.

The PDP's Style of Democracy

Since the advent of the present democratic adventure pioneered by the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, the country has been subjected to untold hardships by her political leaders in the name of democracy. As it was, since the country became a sovereign nation, little progress has been made compared to the opportunities, human and natural resources the country is endowed with. The people are still suffering and smiling (*apologies to late Fela Anikulapo Kuti*), in the midst of plenty.

With justice and equity jettisoned; decorum, respect for rule of law, human dignity, sanctity of life and service for the common good thrown to the winds; leaders of the two

When many people look at the situation we are in presently, they wonder why we still have the level of peace we have in our country. Many nations never had challenges as close to what we are presently experiencing and they are at war; war that has led to the deaths and destruction of many lives. We just know that God has been kind to us. God has been giving us many opportunities to get it right. If we do not get it right, I am afraid what are we going to tell God?

– Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, CBCN President.



**Former President
Olusegun Obasanjo**



**President Shehu
Yar'Adua**



**Former President Ebele
Jonathan**



**Incumbent President
Muhammadu Buhari**

political parties that have ruled the country since 1999 to date, have continued to make the bodies of the country's pioneer political fathers and freedom fighters to twist in agony in their graves. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) ruled for sixteen years (1999 to 2014) while the All Progressives Congress (APC) took over from 2015 to date.

The PDP's 16 years was characterized by a "democratic" process that made the few rich people richer and the majority of Nigerians poorer. Corruption and plundering of the nation's wealth by the few and greedy people in power, was the order of the day. Political office holders were busy diverting the country's wealth and resources to private hands; and using their positions to make majority of Nigerians live in abject poverty. All utility services like electricity supply, water, good qualitative education and good health-care delivery; adequate housing, good roads and security were not at the least they should be. The catalogue of the PDP government undemocratic policies impoverished majority of Nigerians and made the ruling class, members of their families, associates and willing stooges overnight multi-millionaires and billionaires. It was an era of absolute corruption and maladministration; while the little achievements claimed by the party does not justify the period of governance, and the resources at hand. However, the party had to its' credit a safe horizon in most parts of the country and relative peace, though the cash flow which emanated from the roundtrip corruption process, gave many Nigerians a false sense of financial and economic stability. Thus, at the 2015 General Elections, the people voted the party out of power.

APC's Change Mantra Hoodwink

While the sixteen years' rule of the People's Democratic Party was characterized by brazen looting of the nation's treasury; with corruption in both public and private sectors at the highest level; the All Progressives Congress Party (APC), since it came to power has failed to live up to its promise of redeeming the country from the identified "misrule" of the PDP government. Instead of reversing the situation in the country and providing the ray of hope, the APC, as exemplified by its five years' in office, has only succeeded in hoodwinking Nigerians with its Change Mantra; blaming its inaction on the failure of the predecessor government.

Thus, the people who voted this party of the "Change mantra" to power have become victims of circumstances. What the ruling party has succeeded in doing is to change the style of doing "political game of business as usual"; using the

blame game trade tactics; while Nigeria still remains in a disappointing position in the International Transparency (IT) Global Corruption Index list. Despite being a naturally endowed nation with human and natural resources; and with the accolade of having more Christian Churches than Rome and Europe as well as more Mosques than Mecca, Medina and the Arab world; corruption and crime still stink to the high heavens.

The All Progressives Congress (APC) party came to power with the *Change Mantra*, and all Nigerians thought there was light at the end of the tunnel. The party promised to right the wrongs of the 16-years "misrule" of the PDP and entrench true democracy, with justice, equity, peace, freedom and uninhibited unity of all tribes as the pillars of governance. The focus point was the eradication of corruption at all levels as a cardinal commitment.

But the party's six years on the saddle of power seem to have brought more woes to majority of Nigerians. Insecurity, flagrant disrespect for the rule of law, wrong application of justice, threat to religious freedom, killing in the name of religion by Boko Haram, ethnic aggression by the Fulani people, banditry and unending borrowing without justification have been the hallmark of the party's democracy. Corruption took a new dimension, while the anti-corruption war of the party was more of a witch hunting of members of the opposition party. As publicly insinuated by the Chairman of the party, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole: "any member of the opposition who crosses the carpet will have his sins overlooked and in some cases out rightly forgiven".

Without giving the dividends of democracy to the people, the APC Government has sustained the process of making the masses beasts of economic burden with the introduction of excruciating policies that are making life more difficult for them. Taxes have been increased at every available opportunity, including the payment of VAT on phone calls. Thus, the Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS), has become another agent of government for milking the people of their hard earned income; in the face of many socio-economic challenges. The democracy of the country is gradually approaching the edge of the cliff and this is not in the interest of the people of the country, irrespective of their tribe, religion or political inclination.

A Matter of Fundamental Concern

The lack of adequate security for life and property; subtle

promotion of a particular ethnic group and religion at the expense of others, have remained matters of grave concern under the APC Government at the Federal. The concern of Nigerians in respect of some defective principles of the party have been highlighted by the country's elder statesmen; Church leaders, leaders of stakeholder groups, political and socio-economic analysts, at different fora.

The situation of the country under the APC Federal administration was well articulated by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in the communiqué issued at the end of its Second Plenary Meeting in Abeokuta, capital of Ogun State, in September, last year; and titled: **Moving Beyond Precarious Living in Nigeria**. In the communiqué, the Bishops declared: *"There are, unfortunately, still many instances of killings as a result of banditry, kidnapping, assassination, armed robbery, reckless use of force by security agencies and lynching. Lately, too, there is an upsurge in the cases of suicide, even among our youths. Furthermore, the clashes between herdsmen and communities, and the activities of Boko Haram insurgents have continued, in which many innocent people lose their lives. These make living in Nigeria very precarious. They added: "We observe that our democracy is derailing from what it should be. The qualities of accountability, transparency, independence of the judiciary, respect for fundamental rights, observance of the rule of law, and fair and credible electoral process, to mention only these, are still lacking." The Bishops stressed that without adequate security of lives and property, there can be no stability and enabling environment for meaningful development.*

Also, at the end of their Provincial Plenary held in Ibadan in February this year, the Bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province, comprising of the Archdiocese of Ibadan and the dioceses of Ilorin, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and Osogbo; in their communiqué titled: **Nigeria: Still in Search of Authentic Democracy**, expressed concern at the worsening situation of

the security of life and property in the country. Their words: *"Human life seems to have no value in Nigeria. At the beginning of last year, we cried out like all Nigerians did against the woeful security situation at that time." They continued: "Today, a year later, things have become much worse. Nigeria is in security dire-straits. Only few Nigerians in any part of the country can sleep with their two eyes closed. We lament that Nigerians are being slaughtered daily by terrorists, criminals and so-called herdsmen on the roads, in their farms and even in their homes. With the security architecture in Nigeria seemingly on auto-pilot, the country is clearly drifting and needs decisive action to restore professionalism and effectiveness."*

Security of life and Property now a luxury

Though the atrocities of the Boko Haram religion fundamentalists started during the time of the PDP administration, it has now reached a dangerous crescendo with their spineless killing becoming a daily occurrence; while the Federal Government has continuously claimed to be on top of the situation stressing that "Boko Haram has been technically defeated." Entrenched in the North West Region of the country, this group of terrorists whose main targets are Christians of all denominations and their places of worship have killed over 37,000 people in their ten years of operation and turned over 2.4million to internally displaced persons in their fatherland. Their Fulani counterparts have killed over 3,500 people.

While the assault of members of this terrorists group on the fundamental rights and life of the people keep giving the Federal Government a nightmare, the Fulani herdsmen killing squad have also increased their ravaging assault on farmers in different parts of the country, killing with impunity; "on a suspected mission of "ethnic cleansing". Their actions have been really devastating and inhumane and connote that "life of their cows are more important and valuable than the life of an average Nigerian of other ethnic groups.". These rampaging Fulani herdsmen have traversed the entire country and wrecked havoc in the North, East and West regions of the country; and are duly protected by an association known as Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN). The association has on several occasions, at press conferences and other opportunities defended and justified the killings by their members. Ironically, it seems they have the listening ears of the government. The group has often stated with confidence that their members will stop killing innocent farmers only when cattle rustling is stopped. They are not bothered about the havoc their cattle wreck on farmlands of the peasant farmers in different parts of the country. This brazen affront has never attracted any action from the government of the day.

Interference of Security Agents

The country's security agents



Most Rev. Anselm Umoren, Auxilliary Bishop of Abuja in a group photograph with some Sr. Advisors of Catholic Women Organisation (CWO)

have suspiciously remained indifferent to the atrocities activities of these “religion and ethnic squads killers”; as if acting a script with instructions from above. They always look the other way when the Fulani vandals are sniffing life out of innocent peasant farmers. And, as if justifying the horrendous killings of the Fulani herders, the Federal Government instead of acting decisively against their criminal activities offered to pacify them with plan of creating a settlement for the Fulani people and their cows in all the states of the Federation, and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja with the RUGA project. More resentful, is the plan of the government to implement the RUGA project with the tax payers’ money “for the private business of a particular ethnic group; whose ethnic blood flows in the veins of the country’s president. Also, in other parts of the country, bandits, kidnappers and armed robbers have become masters of day and night committing atrocities and killing ruthlessly; on the high ways and homes.

In spite of the claim by the President Muhammadu Buhari led government that the Boko Haram Muslim terrorists have been “technically defeated” and the atrocities of other killer groups brought under control, daily happenings in the country, since the beginning of this year have been in the opposite. Boko Haram and bandits have accelerated their killing of innocent people on daily basis in the entire North West Region and Nasarawa State; while the Fulani herdsmen, kidnappers and armed robbers are having fields’ day in the Middle Belt region and other parts of the country. Kidnappers demand outrageous amounts as ransom, and where the affected families cannot afford the amount demanded, the victims are killed in tortuous manners. The Southern Kaduna ethnic crisis which has led to the deaths of many people of a particular tribe in the state, has also remained a matter of national major concern. In all of these religious and ethnic motivated killings, President Buhari’s has not only been seen to be slow in dealing precisely with these atrocities but has often opted for appeasing and giving financial inducements for these demonic killers.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo, has written open letters to President Muhammadu Buhari, on the worrisome state of insecurity and threat to peace and unity of the country. In his letter of July 15, 2019 on incessant killings across the country, Chief Obasanjo said among other things: *“This issue can no longer be ignored, treated with nonchalance, swept under the carpet or treated with cuddling glove. The issue is hitting at the very foundation of our existence as Nigerians and fast eroding the root of our Nigerian community. I am very much worried and afraid that we are on the precipice and dangerously reaching a tipping point where it may no longer be possible to hold danger at bay. Without being immodest, as a Nigerian who still bears the scar of the Nigerian civil war on my body and with a son who bears the scar of fighting Boko haram on his body, you can understand, I hope, why I am so concerned. When people are desperate and feel that they cannot have confidence in the ability of government to provide security for their lives and properties, they will take recourse to anything and everything that can guarantee their security individually and collectively.”*

The former President who must have been talking with the hindsight of a person who had faced security challenges in one form or the other before, outlined four cardinal areas which the President should focus on and proffered solutions. These are: *“Abandoning Nigeria into the hands of criminals who are all being suspected, rightly or wrongly, as Fulanis and terrorists Boko Haram type; Spontaneous or planned reprisal attacks against Fulanis which may inadvertently or advertently mushroom*

into pogrom or Rwanda-type genocide that we did not believe could happen and yet it happened; Similar attacks against any other tribe or ethnic groups anywhere in the country initiated by rumours, fears, intimidation revenge capable of leading to pogrom; and Violent uprising beginning from one section of the country and spreading quickly to other areas and leading to the dismemberment of the country.”

These appeals have either been deliberately ignored, fallen on deaf ears and tagged political statements or the country’s security agencies are not capable and competent professionally and technically to counter the activities of the terrorists and bandits as a result of the superiority of their fire powers.; or for a tactical hidden agenda.

Call for Change of Guards

Insecurity has been the major challenge of the present administration and it is by all means impacting dangerously on the socio-economic and other aspects of life in the country, especially in the Northeast region. From all indications, the continuous killing and continuous effrontery of the Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, bandits and other killer groups in the country; clearly confirm that all is not well with the security apparatus of the country. Hence, there have been calls from several quarters for the replacement of the country security apparatus leadership, bringing in new strategies and invigoration through new and vibrant officers.

Speaking on the recent killings by Boko Haram insurgents in the Northeast region of the country, the Archbishop emeritus of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan during an interview with the Guardian newspaper in January; called on President Buhari to overhaul the country’s security architecture and bring on board, new people that can do the job better. He urged that: *“The security chiefs should be changed, so that other people can do it better, irrespective of whether they are Christians or Muslims. But you find out that they are all Muslims, you will be thinking that there is something sinister going on.”*

Cardinal Onaiyekan’s position was also shared by the Number 3 citizen of the country, the Senate President; Dr. Ahmad Lawan who, while talking to media men in Abuja, affirmed that after taking a critical look at the rising level of insecurity in the country, it was obvious that the nation’s security architecture has failed. He therefore stressed the need to urgently restructure the country’s security system to be able to live up to its mandate of effectively securing lives and properties of the citizens. He lamented that, in spite of efforts by the President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration to tackle insurgency and all forms of banditry in the country, the security situation had suddenly deteriorated across the land. He insisted that the only way to get out of the menacing quagmire was to restructure the defective security system in the country, and come up with a system that would be result oriented. He added that all hands must be on deck for meaningful result in this respect.

This contention was also echoed by the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Northern chapter, Rev. Yakubu Pam who described the increase in the rate of killings of innocent citizens by the Boko Haram insurgents as a very sad development. Rev. Pam advocated a total reform and overhaul of the security system and appealed to some of the retired Generals and well respected leaders in the north to rise up to the occasion.

Challenges of Religion, Ethnicity and Rule of Law

Another issue that has been of major threat to the unity and peace of the country in the present dispensation is the



The National Assembly in session

promotion of one religion by the government at the expense of others and protecting the interest of one ethnic group over the others in an amalgamation of three major groups of Hausa Yoruba and Ibo with languages and cultures numbering over 250. The former has been the fueling factor of the seeming continuity of the Boko Haram insurgents' atrocities, while the latter has remained the strength of the Fulani herdsmen. Highlighting the danger religion portend for the sustainability of Nigeria as one nation, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah who has served several Federal Government agencies and bodies in the quest to help build an egalitarian Nigerian nation has warned on the danger of using religion as a determinant factor for ruling the country,

He declared: *"Today, this government has dredged up religion and placed it right in the middle of its power calculus and the message is clear: to be with us, religion matters. Religious identity now trumps citizenship or even party loyalty. Politics should be a glue for unity of our people and sharing of power and offices a lubricant for a sense of belonging. Sadly, all this is receding."* **The bishop's contention was contained in his 2019 Christmas message to the nation titled: As the Rainbow Recedes.** Bishop Kukah called for an end to the use of religion to provoke violence and disunity in the country, especially by those in government, adding that the various efforts at intimidating Christians is a divisive effort that portend danger to the country.

The score sheet of the APC government in the area of respect for the rule of law and promotion of justice has also been adjudged low. Court orders have been flagrantly disobeyed by the security agents of the Federal Government like the EFCC and the DSS. Examples of this flagrant disobedience in the name of the power that be, have no doubt dented the democratic image of the country, with particular reference to the cases of Omoyele Sowore and Ibrahim Yaqoub El Zakzaky. In the area of miscarriage of Justice, some judgements in respect of Elections in the country have left sour taste in the mouth; as these were given in the name of legal technicality.

These judgements have made nonsense of the decisions of the people to elect their rulers through the ballot boxes. In the present dispensation, people's electoral decisions have been suspiciously overturned by the courts of law; and it is now easier to become a president, governor, Senator or Honourable member with the assistance of the court than through the ballot box.

The country's security outfits are being used for intimidating the opposition and people of dissenting opinions. The EFCC has become more of a commissioned organization deployed after perceived enemies of the ruling party for the recovery of nation's looted wealth, while the other security agencies have become agents of intimidation to cow perceived enemies of the ruling party to submission while freedom of speech and expression, one of the cardinal principles of true democracy; has been labelled a criminal offence, for which some people have been clamped into jail without trial.

The former Catholic Archbishop Lagos, Anthony Cardinal Okogie, once stated that *"Nigeria is gradually returning to the era of military dictatorship where there is disobedience to the rule of law"*. He decried the frequent disobedience to court orders by the administration led by President Muhammadu Buhari in a statement sent to the Guardian and Punch newspapers in December 2019, titled: *'Corruption and Repression.'* According to the cardinal: *"The painful and sad reality we face is that we live in a country where leaders are very distant from the led. We need leaders who are neither blind to the suffering of the people nor deaf to their cries; leaders who listen to the people, leaders who have the courage to be humble, and who are therefore ready to admit that they are wrong when they are wrong."*

The negative impact of injustice by the country's political leadership was well captured by Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna; as a major cause of unrest and crisis in the country. He described the injustice by the country's political leaders as *"an ailment that has robbed the nation of the peace and unity required in advancing the development and growth of Nigeria."* He noted that: *"... where there are disparities and people are treated unequally, there*

are bound to be problems.” The Archbishop made the remarks while talking to media men after concelebrating the Mass with his brother Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province to pray for the victims of the Kajuru crisis in Kaduna State; late last year. ; Archbishop Ndagoso added that these acts of injustices also exist in other places of the country like the Niger Delta area. He concluded: “Most of these things are hinged on injustice.”

Nepotism has also become the order of the day with family members of the people in power trampling on the rights of other Nigerians and using government properties for personal purposes. Another characteristic of the present administration that is in contention with justice and equity as provided for by the country’s constitution is the issue of national integration. As observed by the Bishops in their Abeokuta Plenary communiqué, the country is badly divided as ethnic chauvinism is mostly pronounced by the lopsidedness in appointments to national offices and employment in Federal Government offices; with one particular major tribe given priority over the others in spite of the concept in our former National Anthem that “though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand”

In most of their communique issued biannually, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, since the advent of self-rule in the country; have always called on the government of the day to address the challenges facing the country in order to make life worth living for the majority of Nigerians who voted them into power.

Heeding the Voices of Reason

As the country continues to drift towards the edge of the cliff, in readiness to summersault from her present state of fragile peace and unity to disintegration, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have not been the lone voice in the wilderness of the country; calling the government of the day to order to save the country from falling apart and make life worth living for the majority who are suffering and languishing in the midst of plenty. Prominent in this perspective is the former President

of the country, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who has in several letters to President Muhammadu Buhari called the attention of the ruling President to the dangers in the land. However, as government have labelled identified challenges have been considered political game play statements that should be ignored.

Particularly in 2019, Chief Obasanjo warned that insecurity was “hitting at the foundation of our existence” and “fast eroding the root of our Nigerian community.” The elder statesman attributed the grievances of the people to poor management or mismanagement of diversity warning that: “A very onerous cloud is gathering. And the rain of destruction, violence, disaster and disunity can only be the outcome. He concluded by saying that “the clock is ticking with a cacophony of dissatisfaction and disaffection in and outside the country.” This warning was contained in Chief Obasanjo’s letter written and made public on July 15, 2019.

Other concerned citizens of the country and elder statesmen like Professor Wole Shoyinka, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar former Vice President to Chief Obasanjo and PDP Presidential candidate in the last Presidential election; former Military Head of State, General Yakubu Gown, General Abdul Salami, the Military man who courageously returned the country to democratic process; state governors, religious leaders, political pundits and analysts and friends of the Nigerian nation within and outside the country have continually expressed concern on the state of the nation and called on President Muhammadu Buhari to facilitate a radical change in his style of administration with particular reference to the security sector.

The President’s Yes Men

What has even been more worrisome is the approach of the communication outfit of government championed by the Minister of Information and Culture and the spokesmen of the President. These are the only set of Nigerians who see nothing wrong in the country and insisted that Nigeria has never had it



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze congratulating Okafor Chigozie Christopher of Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN), as second best graduating student (Cgpa 4.88) of Veritas University, Abuja, recently.

so good.; and yet, they are “honourable” members of the Fourth Estate of the Realm. They have always interpreted the good intentions of other people as political statements of political enemies who are bent in fanning embers of disunity and throwing the country into turmoil and bring the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari into disrepute. This position has earned the Information Minister an unpleasant sobriquet that connotes inconsistency with the truth. The position of this President’s Yes Men even negates the expression of concern by the President himself on the state of insecurity in the country. Incidentally, President Buhari raised a fundamental issue during his recent condolence visit to Borno State when he declared at the palace of Abubakar Elkanemi, the Shehu of Borno that: *“this Boko Haram, or whatever they are, cannot come up to Miaduguri or environs without the local leadership knowing because, traditionally, the local leadership is in charge of the security in their own respective areas. So, with my understanding of our culture, I wonder how Boko Haram survives up till now”*. This is a very loaded observation that connotes that the activities of these killer squads rampaging the country are sponsored.

Taking the Bull by the Horn

However, in the area of security, the people are no longer leaving everything to the Federal Government as the state governors have decided to take the bull by the horn through the setting up of security outfits. And this has broken down the barriers of political and ethnic differences. While the governors of the old Western Region have come together with the initiative of **Amotekun** security outfit, their Eastern and Northern counterparts have also put on the drawing board their own Regional security outfits. The North has **Shege Ka Fasa** as the name of its own regional outfit while the East is yet to disclose the name of its own squad.. It is now a case of Back to your tents oh Israel. It is encouraging that the Minister of Justice and the Inspector General of Police are seeing the reality of the situation and the need for all hands to be on deck on the issue of security in the land; and are supporting the efforts of the governors in their regional security enterprise.

The Way Forward

Although the two political parties - the PDP and APC have done their best in governance; their bests have not been good enough and have not reflected positively on the lives of the people. What they have offered and are still offering is far from the aspirations of the people and democratic norms and principles of the civilized world. Nigeria has continued to wallow in socio-economic and political malaise. It is indeed

hallucinating that in the near six decades of the existence of the country as a sovereign nation; Nigeria is still a fledgling democracy; with the political leaders experimenting with the lives of the people including that of the future generation. The politicians have served their selfish interests and those of their immediate families and stooges enough; they should now serve the people and give the country purposeful political leadership that will ensure development, harmony, religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence, justice and equity. Government should provide good governance for the common good; while there is also the need for a stronger democratic culture, respect for the rule of law and right application of justice; especially by the judiciary; unfettered guarantee for civil and religious rights and security to life and property; employment opportunities for majority of Nigerians, zero tolerance for corruption in all facets of life, and improved economy.

Conclusion

What really then do Nigerians want from the government and the country’s political leaders as well as those managing the public sector and the economy? Anthony Cardinal Okogie, emeritus Archbishop of Lagos gives the answer. His words: *“The painful and sad reality we face is that we live in a country where leaders are very distant from the led. We need leaders who are neither blind to the suffering of the people nor deaf to their cries; leaders who listen to the people, leaders who have the courage to be humble, and who are therefore ready to admit that they are wrong when they are wrong.”*

Also, the CBCN President speaks the minds of many Nigerians when he declared that what Nigerians need and want are: *“...living our lives peacefully without any fear of being kidnapped for ransom or being driven from our home land. Nigerians do not want to be faced with the daily tasks of looking for security persons to escort them to their farms. Nigerians do not want to be afraid when they go to the market to sell or buy; or when they go to the Church or Mosque to pray. We are not asking the Government for too much. We just want to live and care for our families. We want to be able to move freely in the country. Every Government that fails to protect the constitutional rights of her citizens has failed. The government, if it does not respond rapidly to change the situation for good is gradually losing legitimacy. If the leaders of a country cannot ensure peace and security, they have no business using tax payers’ money to provide security for themselves and their families while the rest of Nigerians are dying daily (Message at CBCN second Plenary in Abeokuta, September, 2019).*

Every Government that fails to protect the constitutional rights of her citizens has failed. The government, if it does not respond rapidly to change the situation for good is gradually losing legitimacy. If the leaders of a country cannot ensure peace and security, they have no business using tax payers’ money to provide security for themselves and their families while the rest of Nigerians are dying daily

Ash Wednesday “of Black Cloth” in Nigeria

- ***Catholics in prayer procession for divine intervention over insecurity in the land***
- ***Non-Catholics respond to Bishops' Call***



CSN Director of Pastoral Affairs department, Rev. Fr. Michael Banjo applying ashes to the forehead of the faithful at St. Gabriel Chaplaincy, CSN, Durumi, Abuja

Wednesday, February 27, 2020; will remain a memorable day in the annals of the history of the country, as Catholics and Christians of other denominations in response to the call of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) wore black cloths to begin the year's Lenten Season, to mourn those who have been killed by Boko Haram insurgents, Fulani herdsmen and bandits in different parts of the country, especially in the last six months; and seek divine intervention for the country, as the country's security agents were no longer capable of effectively countering the atrocities of these killer groups; while the Government look indifferent to the plight of the people.

As the voice of the voiceless, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), called the faithful out for a prayer war against the country's present precarious situation and a sober moment in memory of the innocent people who have died and in commiseration with the families that have lost loved ones. The faithful's response to the clarion call of the Bishops was encouragingly unprecedented as they were joined by Christians of other Christian denominations in different parts of the country. Prayer processions were also carried out in some of the dioceses, led by their Bishops.

In Miaduguri, one of the flash point areas in the Boko Haram “infested” area of the North East; the faithful were led in the prayer procession by the Local Ordinary of

the diocese, Most Rev. Oliver Doeme; who while addressing the press on the decision of the Catholic Bishops stated that: “Things are going from bad to worse, and we say enough is enough.” The Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah who led the faithful prayer procession round the state capital of Sokoto; stated that: “Nigeria has bled enough and it is high time for those in authorities to rise up to their responsibilities.” He continued: “many have become widows and orphans, Nigeria is going the way of Rwanda but we believe that with prayers, the problems confronting the nation can be surmounted.” The Local Ordinary of Sokoto Diocese explained that the procession was to mourn those that have been massacred by insurgents, kidnappers and bandits irrespective of their religion and equally pray for the release of those in captivity.

In his own remarks, the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi noted that the Church position was in reaction to the current happenings in the country; incidences of insecurity, people's lives being cut short as a result of kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry and so many ills that take people's life just like that. He continued: “So, the Church in Nigeria is saying, we are going to be in solidarity, we are sad, we are aggrieved, we are mourning, and we mourn for our brothers and sisters, especially those killed.

Fr. Samjumi added: “The Church is saying enough is enough, let government wake up, do the needful, protect its own citizens. That is why today, the bishops have directed that all Catholics and Christians in solidarity, should wear black to demonstrate this silent protest.”

In the statement titled: Prayer and Penance for Peace and Security in our Country and signed by Archbishop Augustine Akubeze and Bishop Camillus Umoh, President and Secretary of the Conference, respectively, the Bishops called on all Catholics and other Christians to celebrate this year's Ash Wednesday in sober reflection and wear black to commemorate the memory of all those who have been killed as a result of the country's state of insecurity and wanton killing by insurgents, herders, bandits and kidnappers in all parts of the country.

In the afternoon of Sunday, March 1, after the Opening Ceremony of their First Plenary Meeting for the year, the Bishops led the faithful in a prayer protest march in Abuja; with a procession from the Christian Centre, Central Area, to the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral, Garki. The procession was concluded with a Benediction, presided over by the President of the Conference, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze.

In the last six months, the country's insecurity challenges have reached the crescendo of human

BLACK CLOTH ASH WEDNESDAY AT ST. GABRIEL CHAPLAINCY.



Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu presiding at the celebration of the Ash Wednesday Mass. He is flanked by Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, CSN Secretary General (left) and Rev. Fr. Ukeme Bassey, Personal Assistant to the Secretary General.



Cross section of the Chaplaincy Parishioners at the Mass



Another group of the Chaplaincy Parishioners at the Mass



L-R: Sr. Bernardine Ikeji with other CSN Staff at the Mass



Some workers of the CBCN agencies at the Mass.



Cross section of CSN and CCFN Staff at the Mass



Group photograph of CSN/other CBCN Agencies workers with the CSN Director of Pastoral Agents, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu.

tolerance; and there is the utmost need for all hands to be on deck to save the country from eminent total collapse and dismemberment of the united nation foisted on the three major ethnic tribes of Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba; along with other minority groups; by the British amalgamation of 1914. Insecurity is the order of the day, while the socio-economic policies of government continue to make the people poorer and religious freedom restricted to a part of the country.

About forty thousand innocent citizens have been killed; since the spineless killers started the activities; while thousand others have been maimed as a result of the atrocities of these plunderers whose activities have heightened in the last six months with the country's security agencies no longer capable to match their fire power and protect the people of the country. Also, over three million people, mostly women and children have become displaced and are living as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) in their fatherland, under the most inhuman conditions. The country is indeed "like a ship stranded on the high seas, rudderless and with broken navigational aids. ... Nigeria is on the crossroads, and its future hangs precariously in the balance." (homily at the burial ceremony of young seminarian Nadi, at the Good Shepherd 6 Seminary Kaduna on February 11, 2020).

The general consensus of all stakeholder groups leaders is the need for the overhaul of the country's security architecture, change of tactics and game plan as well as the replacement of the present team of the nation's security outfits and injection of fresh blood with new ideas and desire to serve and save their fatherland. But the government is thinking otherwise, with the spokesmen of the President, led by the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed saying that all is well in the country and Nigeria never had it so good.

Below is the Ash Wednesday statement of the Catholic Bishops Conference:

PRAYER AND PENANCE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN OUR COUNTRY.

In Ramah is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping! Rachel mourns her children; she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more.» (Jeremiah 31: 15)

Today is Ash Wednesday. On this day, Christians all over the world begin a spiritual journey of repentance marked by prayer, penance, almsgiving and other forms of charitable works. We do this to participate more intimately in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, in preparation for the celebration of the solemn feast of his Resurrection at Easter.

As we begin the Holy Season, we, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, invite all Catholics in Nigeria as well as other Christians and persons of goodwill to unite in prayer and penance for peace and security in our country. The level of insecurity in Nigeria today is such that whether at home or on the road, most Nigerians, in all the parts of the country, live in fear. The repeated barbaric executions of Christians by the Boko Haram insurgents and the incessant cases of kidnapping for ransom linked to the same group and other terrorists have traumatised many citizens. That the perpetrators of these heinous crimes make public shows of them on social media and Nigerians, do not

hear of any arrests or prosecution of the criminals raises grave questions about the ability and willingness of the government to protect the lives of the ordinary Nigerians. To make matters worse, many communities are constantly threatened, harassed and sometimes even sacked by herdsmen, as they seek to take over more territories to graze their cattle forcefully.

Aware of our moral responsibility, may we, once again, remind all the arms of Government in Nigeria and all whose responsibility it is to protect Nigerians that without security there can be no peace and without peace, there can be no development or national growth. We, therefore, appeal to the Government to immediately put a stop to this unprecedented wave of violence and brutality aimed particularly at Christians. We also call for the arrest and prosecution of all those behind these senseless killings that sow the dangerous seeds of hate and distrust among the various segments of the Nigerian society.

We are sad. We are in sorrow and grief. But we are confident that the light of Christ, which shines in our hearts, will brighten the dark corners of our Nigerian society. As a mark of mourning for all our brothers and sisters who have been victims of the most recent wave of violence against Christians, we are all dressed in black today and offer our prayers and penance for their repose. We invite the universal Church and all Christians to join us in prayers for our dead brothers and sisters and for peace and security in Nigeria. We equally appeal to the international community to come to the aid of the Nigerian government in the fight against these daredevil terrorists, who want to graze our country. The consequences, should they succeed, will be grave not only for the West African sub-region but also for Africa as a whole.

To all our faithful, therefore, we make a passionate appeal: The present situation in Nigeria challenges all of us to a life of coherent witnessing to the Gospel. The impact of our Christian faith must be felt in public life. This is not a time for compromises for the sake of personal convenience, but rather for heroism in Christian virtues. Remember the words of our Lord: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matthew 10: 28) Furthermore, foreseeing a period like this in the life of his disciples, our Lord said: "You will be hated by all because of my name, but no hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance, you will secure your lives" (Luke 21: 19). Before long, it will be Easter and the Lord will show that he has triumphed over evil, darkness and death. Be of good courage!

Our Lady Queen of Nigeria and Queen of Peace, pray for us.

Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze
President CBCN

Most Rev. Camillus Umoh
Secretary CBCN

**SAY THE ROSARY
EVERYDAY**

CBCN PEACE PRAYER PROTEST MARCH IN ABUJA:

- **Bishops, Faithful seek Divine intervention over state of insecurity in Nigeria**
- *Inadequacy of Government berated*
- CBCN President appeals for intervention of foreign countries

The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, joined by Priests, Religious and thousands of lay faithful in Abuja, on Sunday March 1, held a Peace Prayer Protest march from the Christian Ecumenical Centre, Central District of Abuja; to the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral, Area 3, Garki; to urge the Federal Government to be more proactive in addressing the alarming state of the issue of insurgency in the country, and seek divine intervention on this demoralizing challenge that has led to the death of many innocent Nigerians in the hands of criminal groups like: the Boko Haram Islamic Fundamentalists, Fulani Cattle herdsman, bandits and kidnappers who have been on rampage in different parts of the country.

The procession which was a sober reflection of the situation in the country featured the Bishops and priests wearing Black Cassocks while the faithful were also clad in black dresses. The recitation of the Rosary and other prayers were led by Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna of Owerri Archdiocese. Not even the slight rain showers could deter the Bishops and their followers from fulfilling their spiritual obligation of asking for God's intervention for the country, with the special protest procession. The ceremony culminated at the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral Church, Area 3, Garki, with a Benediction Service, presided over by the President of the Conference, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, who in his address made a passionate plea to the Federal Government to be more proactive in addressing the issue of insecurity in the country. He also sought the assistance of the international community to help Nigeria on the issue of her insecurity predicament; which now seems to be larger than the country's security agents to contain.

Below is the address of Archbishop Akubeze at the ceremony.

Today we the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria and with significant support of priests, consecrated persons and our beloved lay faithful embark on a peaceful protest against the high level of insecurity in every part of Nigeria. We are on this peaceful protest on behalf of the over 22 million Catholics and over 100 million Christians in Nigeria. We are protesting against the brutal killings of innocent Nigerians by Boko Haram, and terrorists' herdsman who are invading people's farmlands forcefully. We are gathered here to register our protest against the kidnapping for ransom in every part of Nigeria. We are gathered to mourn the women, children, babies, and men who have been killed by the terrorists. We are gathered to let the Federal Government of Nigeria know that we are tired of hearing from them that Boko Haram has been "technically defeated" even when they still attacked with impunity. Many local and international security experts have concluded that the terrorists use weapons that are very sophisticated.

Our protest is part of our religious obligation to speak prophetically against whatever is against God's



Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, CBCN President reading the message of the Conference at the Benediction Service at the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria, Pro-Cathedral, Garki, Abuja.

commandment. The killing of God's children is evil. The failure to protect innocent people from relentless attacks is evil. The lack of prosecution of terrorists is evil. Our Government response to terrorist attack is, for lack of better words, far below average. There have been too many mass burials. Too many kidnappings of school children, of travellers, invasion of peoples' homes, invasion of sacred places like Churches, mosques, seminary, etc. We sometimes read of our Government sending condolence messages to western countries when there is a terrorist attack that may have led to the death of one or two persons. We commend the Federal Government for doing this. But we are utterly surprised to discover that the same Nigerian Federal Government will not even send a condolence message to families who have suffered fatalities in the hands of Boko haram. We see our President rarely visit or even speak to Nigerians when there are terrorist attacks in Nigeria. The several attacks on the lives of Nigerians are almost a new normal. Our Government seem completely insensitive to the plight of Nigerians. A Government that totally ignores the cries of those who elected them is set up for a fantastic failure. It doesn't matter which party is in power. Only recently we have seen that some of those in the Presidency have discovered that they can no longer go to some places where they campaigned before election. They are being booed by those who once supported them because these Nigerians feel let down.

To Mr President, Your Excellency, we are here to let you know that we pray every day for the success of your Government in dealing with insecurity in Nigeria. We pray daily for the Government you lead to bring Nigerians together and make every Nigerian feel that they are equal in the country irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. We want you to know that we pray to God to help your Government realise that loyalty to Nigerians, loyalty to the unity of the country should trump the desire by some people around to fill sensitive top security positions with people from one section who shared one religious belief. This is a recipe for disaster in a multi-ethnic, and multi-diverse nation. To President Buhari we say, please listen to the cries of

CBCN LED PRAYER PROTEST PROCESSION IN ABUJA IN PICTURES



Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze (right) CBCN President with the Vice President, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji at the Christian Ecumenical Centre before the beginning the protest march.



Bishop Godfrey Onah of Nsukka reading the scripture



Cross section of faithful at the Ecumenical Centre before the protest



Cross section of faithful during the protest



L-R: Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese, Bishop Denis Isizoh, Auxilliary of Onitsha; Archbishop-elect of Jos, Most Rev. Matthew Audu and Bishop Calistus Onaga of Enugu (back row).



Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, CBCN President reading the message of the Conference at the Benediction Service at the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria, Pro-Cathedral, Garki, Abuja.



Cross section of faithful during the protest



Cross section of faithful at Our Lady Queen of Nigeria after the protest



John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja and Archbishop Augustine Akubeze, President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, (First and second from left) leading the prayer protest march in Abuja on Sunday, March 1.

Nigerians. Listen to the National Assembly when they, in a unanimous voice call you to change the security chiefs. Listen to Muslim leaders who call for more Government proactive actions to prevent terrorist attacks in Nigeria and especially in North Eastern Nigeria. Mr President, please ask for foreign help to stop this over 12 years of terrorist attacks on Nigerians. Mr President stop those who work with you from politicising the killings of Nigerians. The bombs of the terrorists do not know who is a member of APC or PDP. Mr President, Nigeria is a secular State, act to reassure Nigerians that there is no agenda to Islamize Nigeria. Your silence is breeding and sowing seeds of mistrust and the longer it stays this way, the more you lose those who could have given you benefit of doubt. Only few Nigerians can defend you with reasons. Only few Nigerians can argue that your silence is not an endorsement of the barbaric actions of the terrorists.

We as a Church do not support any political party. We condemn any form of social injustice perpetuated against the people. The lack of significant actions to prevent and secure the release of those being held in captivity by Boko haram is unacceptable to us. We cannot understand why the Government is not able to secure the release of the rest of the chibok girls, the release of Leah Sharibu and others still being held. We cannot understand why the Government reaction to the beheading of Reverend Lawan Andimi has not shown that there is going to be any consequences upon those responsible. Nigerians are tired of reading of the killing of an orphan (a seminarian) who was just eighteen years old. Nigerians are tired of hearing of the inexcusable actions of the Government in their response to these and many other sad cases.

We the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria call on the international communities to come to the aid of Nigeria. We must see ourselves as a global family in the world. The tears and pains of the helpless persecuted Christians in Nigeria should be

well reported in the West. Western Journalists and Western Political Leaders should give Boko Haram the attention they give to other terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, and ISIS. If the Western media give comprehensive steadfast coverage to the atrocities happening in Nigeria, they will discover that people are dying daily in Nigeria from the hands of Boko Haram about the same way people are dying in Syria.

As we march and protest today, we want all Catholics in Nigeria not to be hopeless. We want Catholics and other well-meaning patriotic Nigerians to stand together to fight this terrorism. We must speak out against Government inaction and poor response. We must work and pray for change to happen in Nigeria. As we entrust our country Nigeria to God, let us also entrust the terrorists into the hands of God. God can change their hearts of stone to a heart of flesh. Let us pray for their conversion. Let us pray to God to help our leaders to have the wisdom and courage to do what is good for every Nigerian. Let us eschew every form of hate speech, or incitement of violence. Only Love can conquer violence and hatred. May God bless Nigeria. Thank you for your attention.

We cannot understand why the Government reaction to the beheading of Reverend Lawan Andimi has not shown that there is going to be any consequences upon those responsible. Nigerians are tired of reading of the killing of an orphan (a seminarian) who was just eighteen years old. Nigerians are tired of hearing of the inexcusable actions of the Government in their response to these and many other sad cases.

The signs are ominous, if what the Nigerian nation is experiencing in the last few years, especially in 2019; are the dividends of democracy! Since the advent of the present political dispensation, the Nigerian electorate has been subjected to different types of insults and assaults from their elected political leaders; in the name of democratic process. The Federal legislators pay themselves astronomical salaries while their performances at the Legislative Houses do not justify the means. Workers are not being adequately remunerated, while the masses remain the beasts of burden to sustain the nation's fragile economy.

Corruption has become an illegal "legality" at all levels, and the nations' wealth being plundered by a privileged few at the corridor of power at the expense of the majority, who continue to persevere in resilience, hoping tomorrow will be good. Thus, they have kept on praying for a change of heart on the part of their rulers, hoping that they will serve the common good for posterity to cherish.

But alas, in the last quarter of last year, the leopard in the being of the Federal Legislators became obvious as they attempted to legalize their atrocities against the people and democratic tendencies through the sponsorship of the FAKE NEWS BILL that would silence the people, in the Red Chambers of the National Assembly; so that the politicians in power can continue to ravage the country's economy without challenge.

But as result of pressure from different quarters, including some members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); the proposed bill has been put in the cooler. The Bishops, as voices of the voiceless warned of the dangers inherent in the legislation of such a bill that tends to curtail the freedom of expression and infringe on the fundamental rights of the people. They identified the several challenges that could jeopardize the peace and unity of the country, if the bill as being concocted by both the Executive and Legislative arms of government is passed. They pointed out that the Fake News Bill being proposed



Archbishop Alfred Martins



Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna

FAKE NEWS BILL **Bishops warn of Ominous signs**

by the Upper Chamber of the National Assembly is to stifle freedom of expression while contentious issues like insecurity of life and property, divisive use of religion to fan embers of disunity and spineless killing of innocent people by bandits, herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorists are being handled with kids gloves by both the Executive and Legislative arms of Government. They called on the

Federal Legislators to address more contentious issues that are threatening the peace and unity of the country instead compounding the situation by promoting a bill that will serve their selfish interests alone and at the expense of majority of Nigerians.

Describing the proposed Hate Speech Bill as a clear indication of the country

drifting gradually to a military-like dictatorship, Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Owerri noted that many things are wrong with the country in the present political dispensation.

He identified hateful attitude of Nigerians as a people; military dictatorship-like of the present administration; and absence of democratic governance engineered with the rule of law as factors mitigating against the unity and development of the country. The Archbishop declared: "We seem to be under military rule. We are unjustly ruled through a military-like dictatorship. You cannot unjustly introduce a bill on hate speech and against social media. Christ himself who is the supreme justice suffered not only hate speech but physical abuse, hence he was crucified on the Cross for our sake. He added: "We are facing tyranny in Nigeria"

The Archbishop made the observations in his homily at the inauguration Mass of Catholic Lawyers Association of Nigeria, held at the Maria Assumpta Cathedral, Owerri, Imo State, on December 1, 2019. Noting that all forms of criminal activities have taken root in the country, the Archbishop expressed concern that the people are helpless as if there is no democratic government that is engineered by the rule of law.



Mr. Lai Mohammed

In his own remarks, Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins of Lagos ascribed good governance and transparency in administration as the best antidote for hate speech, instead of a draconian law being proposed by the Federal Legislators, adding that promulgating a draconian law of capital punishment as being proposed by the country's Federal lawmakers will amount to entrenching tyranny and anarchy.

In a statement titled: Hate Speech Bill: Beware of Entrenching Tyranny and Anarchy; and released in Lagos by Rev. Fr. Anthony Godonu, the Archdiocese's Director of Social Communications; the Archbishop cautioned the Federal Lawmakers to tread softly on the plan to pass the bill recommending capital punishment for hate speech noting that the action might result in criminalizing freedom of expression, "which is an inherent fundamental right of every human being in a democracy and would be tantamount to entrenching tyranny and anarchy in the land."

While pointing out that there are enough provisions in the country's law books to address such issues that border on character assassination, sedition, etc, Archbishop Martins stated: "Apart from that, such a law could become a tool for persecuting anyone whose way of expressing dissenting opinions offends powerful people in the society. He added that a bill advocating capital punishment for those found guilty of hate speech offences could be counterproductive and further threaten the fragile peace in the country.

He contended that "mass advocacy, coupled with running a truthful, transparent and credible government would help to curb hate speech and peddling of falsehood." He added that: "A government that is transparent, truthful and credible which gives ample evidence of its performance would itself put detractors to shame and then voiceless." The Catholic Bishop of Oyo Diocese, Most Rev. Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo in his own statement emphasized that politicians who lived by hate speech and fake news cannot legislate on it; warning that: "recommending death by hanging for anyone found guilty of hate speech, is an attack on Nigerians and what decency is left of the country by the very people supposedly elected to work for Nigeria's progress." The Bishop contended that Nigeria should not be proposing capital punishment at this period when other civilized countries are abandoning it because life is inviolable. His words: "Capital punishment really just makes society



Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah

more violent and does not really work as a deterrent. That Nigerian lawmakers would contemplate the death penalty for hate speech in a country where hate crimes like political assassination, violent political rhetoric, ethnic cleansing, kidnapping for ransom etc. have occurred for years without much response from government and security agencies is very distressing. The lawmakers should be fighting to decrease the harvest of death in parts of Nigeria". He stressed that human life is sacred and belongs only to the Creator to take.

According to Bishop Badejo: "One wonders at the enthusiasm and passion with which our lawmakers are pushing this bill. Could it be for self-preservation rather than national interest? To even suggest that the bill could be retroactive is evidence of how much Nigeria seems to retrogress while other countries progress. It is a vestige of past governments' strategy to victimize perceived enemies and muzzle free speech. The people know then and it is "déjà vu".

Bishop Badejo noted that if the bill was passed, Nigeria might as well bid bye to press freedom as anyone who has power and has something to hide could invoke the law and conjure such punishment for perceived enemies. "Nigeria might as well forget the much-touted fight against corruption for the same reasons".

From all indications, the legislators were not alone in their push for capital punishment and the Hate Speech Bill as the involvement of the executive arm of Government in the conspiracy was orchestrated by the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed in his outrageous reaction to the opposition of the people to the introduction of capital punishment for those found guilty of hate speech. But he got a well-deserved scolding for his anti-people stance on the bill from the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah, who strongly condemned the outburst of the minister, saying: "The Minister has used some rather harsh and divisive words that suggest some contempt for the voices and views of those whose labours and sacrifices brought him and his government to where they are today."

The bishop's condemnation of the Minister's insensitivity to the wishes of the people was contained in a statement released in Sokoto, and tilted: Social Media Bill: Short Walk to Totalitarianism? According to the bishop, the minister's language "is disrespectful, appalling and illustrative of the highhandedness that suggests that we are not in a democracy." He added: "The language is as intolerant as it is alienating. The Minister says that no amount of threat,

blackmail etc will dissuade the government from going ahead with the social media bill because it is borne out of patriotism. Really?"

Bishop Kukah averred: "The recent outrage by the Minister of Information, Mr. Lai Mohammed over public reaction to the Social Media Bill, is illustrative of the point I am making, namely, that not all who call themselves democrats appreciate the enormous burden that goes with the claim today." Noting that the proposed Hate Speech Bill is redundant and superfluous and a fraud; the bishop stressed that the government has all the laws it needs to fight any form of crime and individuals can fall back on it. He added that the ultimate goal of this bill "is not to punish those who offend, but those who offend government or those in government". The Bishop continued on the minister's language: "There are many questions begging for answers here. Is this the language of democracy? Is this the language of people who understand or have really imbibed and internalized the spirit and fine principles of democracy?"

The Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese noted that "law making is a serious business and it demands high moral standards of honesty on the lawmaker. No citizen should be compelled to obey bad laws. Patriotism is not a commodity of exchange."

Bishop Kukah also used the occasion to speak on the present political system of the country which he described as being far distant from the ethos and norms of a democratic system as known and practiced in the civilized countries of the world. He declared that: "Democracy thrives on debate, consensus building, negotiation, persuasion, argumentation, rule of law, process, and inclusion. The military thrives in a coup culture, secrecy, betrayal, violence, command structure, exclusion and lack of transparency. That explains why I have always warned against describing the current charade of violent elections as democracy."

The hate speech Bill is presently in the cooler, thanks to the country's bishops and other Nigerian elder statesmen and leaders like former President Olusegun Obasanjo and Nigeria's Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Shoyinka and a host of other freedom fighters who have been courageous enough to confront our legislators whose primary goal with the bill was the protection of their selfish desires. In his letter of July 15, 2019 to President Muhammadu Buhari, former President Olusegun Obasanjo warned: "No one can stop hate speech, violent agitation and smouldering violent agitation if he fans embers of hatred, disaffection and violence. It will continue to snowball until it is out of control. A stitch in time saves nine goes the old saying."

In a paper titled: From Miyetti to Haiti: Notes from a Solidarity Visit presented at the maiden edition of Ripples Nigeria Dialogue, organized by Ripples Centre for Data and



Bishop Emmanuel Badejo

Investigative Journalism in Lagos in 2019; Professor Wole Shoyinka, appraising the Nigerian situation generally stated that the country is sick and called on the people to rise up against the Hate Speech Bill. His words: "One fundamental problem of this nation is that we are not looking through the mirror. While we are still battling with the new culture of kidnapping, armed robbery and all that, the Senate has worsened our case with the new bill to hang us if we make a speech. This is another attempt to silence criticism. I call on Nigerians to resist this law. The bill is to silence criticism and buy immunity so that their acts will not be exposed. This is coming at a time the world is trying to end capital punishment". The Nobel Laureate in a letter to the National Assembly members in November last year, also told the Federal Legislators, among other things: "Your motivations are also spectacularly dubious. Silencing the voices of criticism is a perennial preoccupation of power, but we know that a far more penetrative form of death, spelling the end of social vitality and relevance is incurred when human voices are silenced. Try and imagine how many "deserved" executions would be taking place in this nation right now, beginning with nearly all of you in the exalted homes of legislation ... if Boko Haram has succeeded in subjugating this nation under its creed."

With every new political dispensation, the principles of democracy continue to be compromised, while the peoples' rights are trampled upon by those elected to office to provide adequate service and protection. There is no doubt that no country or society thrives on the publication of fake news, but the proposition of Senator Aliyu Sabi Abdullahi of Niger State in the Senate in respect of the Fake News Bill and the recommendation of Death Penalty for offenders is like killing a fly with a sledge hammer. The daily killings by Boko Haram insurgents, Fulani Herdsmen, bandits, armed robbers, cultists, kidnappers and ritualists have spilled enough blood in the land. Therefore, initiating another killing spree through a doubtful and self centred legality and settlement of personal scores against imaginary enemies is not in the interest of democracy and the growth of our great country. This is especially so, when it is obvious that those in government or authority will use the bill to eliminate enemies to cover up their unholy deeds. And more importantly, human life is sacred and belongs only to God the maker, who decides when to give and when to take. Killing in whatever form and for whatever reason in the present day world is not only a dehumanizing and disrespect to the dignity of human life but also a grave sin against God.



Chief Olusegun Obasanjo

CSN/CBCN AGENCIES 2020 ANNUAL RETREAT IN PICTURES



The Retreat moderator, Bishop Godfrey Onah of Nsukka leading the workers in prayer before the lecture sessions.



Cross section of CARITAS Nigeria staff during the lecture session.



CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi (2nd from left) and other workers of the CBCN listening to the retreat moderator.



Rev. Fr. George Ajana, PMS National Director, Sr. Rosana and Rev. Fr. Michael Banjo listening to the retreat moderator during one of the lecture sessions.



Cross section of CSN Staff during one of the presentation sessions.



Cross section of CARITAS Nigeria staff at the one of the lecture sessions.



Cross section of staff of the CBCN agencies at one of the lecture sessions.



Some of the workers listening to the retreat moderator.

WORKERS OF BISHOPS CONFERENCE BEGIN 2020 ON PRAYERFUL NOTE

• Urged to be missionaries for the Common Good as Purity of Heart will make them Agents of positive change in the Society

About 350 workers of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Catholic Caritas Foundation and other agencies of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria working in all parts of the country, gathered at the CSN Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja to begin the Year 2020 on a prayerful note with a two-day Retreat. The retreat session was facilitated Most Rev. Godfrey Onah, the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka, Diocese, who also declared work open for the year 2020 at the Secretariat, on behalf of the President of the Bishops' Conference, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, who is also the Metropolitan of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province. The retreat featured the celebration of the Mass, recitation of the rosary, reflections, confessions and Emmaus Walk, among other activities; including meetings to kick start the year by the various offices and departments and social gathering. Other agencies whose workers were present at the retreat are: Veritas Travels Ltd; National Catholic Service Centre (NCSC) Salus Trust Ltd, Opus Securitatis, Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) and Catholic Secretariat Investments Concepts Ltd (CICL).

Facilitating the retreat with the theme: The Story of the Magi: Walking in the Footsteps of the Magi; Bishop Onah urged the workers of the CBCN to be prayerful and make the year 2020 one of mission in the service of the Church for the common good of mankind; as agents of the Church in the service of Christ. He urged them to imitate the Magi in their apostolate giving them three pillars of direction in this perspective.

He noted that the workers of the Bishops' Conference agencies, by virtue of their work have become one family because, they pray together and do a lot in common for the sake of the Church and humanity; despite coming from different homes, dioceses and backgrounds. He added that they must search for Christ, encounter him with all sincerity of heart; and listening to him with total commitment; and they are bound to receive positive response.

While reminding the workers that following Christ without encountering challenges is impossible as Christ himself also encountered them when he was alive; the Bishop declared: "What you need is direction and collaboration with others in the course of your work in the service of the Church and mankind," The retreat master added: "The Word of God tells you something new each time."

Bishop Onah also told the workers that purity of heart would enable them to encounter Christ and transform them to positive agents of change in their environment, with a view of getting the country out of distress. Pointing out that the Catholic Church is on mission to pull Nigeria out of distress; the retreat facilitator stressed that as workers of the Church, they must be part of this determination of the Church, spiritually and pastorally.



Bishop Godfrey Onah

Using the story of the Child Jesus, the Magi and King Herod to buttress his point on the issue of light and darkness, the bishops remarked that while the child Jesus is Light of the world, King Herod represented darkness. He stressed the importance of sincerity of purpose and positive motive, which king Herod did not have towards the child Jesus. While pointing out that there are many Herods in the world today, the bishop advised the workers not to be the Herod in their places of work or within the society at large. In his homily at the celebration of the Mass, Bishop Onah urged the workers to imbibe love and compassion which are two of the virtues bequeathed by Christ as pillars of the Christian faith for every true Christian. According to him, the love of God made him to sacrifice himself for us and Christian love is love in practice and we must be compassionate. Stressing the need to have the knowledge of God to be able to practice the Christian faith properly, Bishop Onah stated that when Christ came, it was difficult to teach the people the faith because they were ignorant. He continued: "While the people came looking for Christ for bread; he told them what he was teaching them was more important – love and compassion."

Speaking on the challenges of the Nigerian situation, Bishop Onah noted that every Nigerian has a role to play "within the context of our community, environment and offices, as individuals and groups".

"Every Nigerian has a role to play within the context of our community environment and offices as individuals and groups"

CSN/CBCN AGENCIES 2020 ANNUAL RETREAT IN PICTURES



The retreat moderator, Bishop Godfrey Onah of Nsukka during one of the lecture sessions.



Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, Director of Social Communications and Deputy Secretary General



Cross section of the workers at the retreat.



Some of the workers of National Catholic Service Centre and Salus Trust Ltd, listening to the retreat facilitator.



L-R: Ify Tony-Monye of CARITAS Nigeria; Rev. Fr. Mark Obayi, CBCN Youth Committee Secretary and Miss Fidelia Angbalaga of the Communications Directorate at the retreat.



Cross section of some staff of the CBCN agencies.



L-R: Catherine Okeke, Receptionist; Rev. Fr. Joseph Offor, Director, National Catholic Service Centre, Lagos; Fr. Isaac Dugu, Director, Pastoral Agents Dept. and Sir Godwin Ukel, the Chief Auditor of the CBCN conglomerate at the lecture sessions.



Cross section of CARITAS Nigeria workers at the outstations at the retreat.

MISSIO CONFERENCE ON PEACE AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE



Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo Diocese presiding at the opening Mass. Left is Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi; CSN Secretary General while right is Rev. Fr. George Ajana, National Director of Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS)



L-R: Rev. Fr. Dirk Bungenor and other Priests at the celebration of the opening Mass



L-R: Marita Wanger, Katja Herdemann, Klaus Vellguth Adjaaji Thomas and Fornet Ponce at the celebration of the Mass.



Some participants in a group photograph with Bishop Badejo (5th from left)



L-R: Rev. Fr. Bungenor, Katja Dirk Heidemanno, Bishop Badejo of Oyo Diocese (First right) and another guest at the conference.



Cross section of participants at the conference.



Rev. Fr. Dirk Bungenor, leader of the Missio delegation with Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, CSN Secretary General.



John Cardinal Onaiyekan making an intervention at one of the sessions

Missio Conference aimed at addressing Challenges facing the Country

The recent Missio Conference on Peace and Interreligious Dialogue is part of the collaborative efforts of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and its German counterpart at promoting global peace and religious harmony among all the peoples of the world irrespective of the noted difference. The Conference which was jointly organized by Missio Aachen of Germany on behalf of the German Bishops Conference and the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), the CBCN administrative Office took place at the CSN Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja; between 19 – 22, January, this year. It was a fact finding and experience sharing academic deliberations between delegate-representatives of the two Bishops Conferences. The German delegation consisted of an 8-man delegation led by Rev. Fr. Dirk Bengener; while the Nigerian delegation of about 30 participants, led by John Cardinal Onaiyekan, emeritus Archbishop of Abuja, included the CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi; Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomwhange, the CSN Director of Mission and Dialogue; the Pontifical Mission Societies of Nigeria (PMS) National Director, Rev. Fr. George Ajana and other priests, religious and lay faithful involved in the Church's Mission and Dialogue and ecumenical activities in the country.

The programme started with an Opening Mass, at the St Gabriel Chaplaincy Church, Durumi, with Bishop Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo of Oyo Diocese, presiding. In his homily, Bishop Badejo emphasized the importance of mission in the life of every Christian, noting that it is not a light one; as we are expected to carry the message, the peace, the cross of Christ into the world to ensure that our world becomes a better place for everyone to live in, a place where everyone can feel the love of God.

Speaking on the theme of the conference and the collaboration between the two Bishops Conferences to make life worth living for the needy and the down trodden; Bishop Badejo used the readings of the day to buttress his point. According to him: "God has given us the gift of faith and the gift of

holiness. The Bishop however, expressed concern that "we are not making the faith to be actual in our daily life." He added: "While the world is giving faith, hope, love, peace, holiness a bad name, we are reminded that God always takes care of our needs not our wants. Those things are always different." He noted that while the world of today is filled with too many wants disguised as needs; "as we go as agents on mission, our duty is to go an extra mile to carry a heavier cross just so that the face of Jesus might be shown to the rest of our brothers and sisters."

The celebration of the Mass was followed by the two days of discussion and sharing on the challenges of peace in the context of the country's present situation and the role of interreligious dialogue in this perspective.

Speaking further on the purpose of the programme, the CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi stated that the Missio delegation was in the country as part of the annual programme of the agency in addressing challenges in mission territories in respect to evangelization; find out the challenges and see how the office can mobilize and organize funds to sustain mission activities in the mission territories. This is part of the annual mission month activities of the agency, and Nigeria has been chosen for this year in the context of the role of interreligious dialogue for the promotion of peace.

While in the country, the Missio delegation visited the Catholic Television Station of Abuja Archdiocese; Jos Archdiocese and the diocese of Yola where they are sponsoring some mission projects. The programme at the CSN Resource Centre was rounded up with a reception organized in honour of the visitors by the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria.



Members of the Missio delegation from Germany in a group photograph with the workers of Catholic Television, Abuja

Bishop Chairman Conducts Job Description Exercise For Directors In Warri

- ***Says No room for half measure in communications apostolate***

Enhancing the communications apostolate of the Church in Nigeria is an essential pillar for the reach-out mission of the Church with the Good News of Christ to all nooks and crannies of the country. Therefore, all hands must be on deck for the realization of this objective while those involved in the apostolate must be fully involved and dedicated. This was the primary objective of the Bishop Chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Directorate of Social Communications, Most Rev. Denis Isizoh, who in his opening address at the second plenary meeting of the Diocesan/Religious Directors of Communications, in Warri, Delta State; stated that "there is no room for half measure performance in the communication apostolate of the Church, considering the challenges of modern day communication technology."

The meeting of the directors took place at the Jubilee Hotel and Resorts, Enerhen, Effurum, Warri, Delta State. The meeting was attended by about 60 directors and other communications officers from nine of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of the Church in the country. The plenary started with an opening Mass presided over by the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. John Afareha; assisted by the Bishop Chairman and the President of the association, Very Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan.

Conducting an "identification/job description exercise" of diocesan directors of communication at the meeting; the Bishop Chairman noted that in the context of the present day communication technology, the work of Church communication directors deserves full time attention, passion and commitment on the part of the occupier of the position; adding that this might not be possible where they are loaded with other pastoral positions that demand equal or more attention.

Bishop Isizoh expressed concern that some directors of communications are overburdened with multiple pastoral duties that they hardly have the needed time to really develop communications apostolate in their Archdioceses or dioceses. He pointed out that a diocesan communications director cannot combine his work with many other pastoral responsibilities, as these might demand conflicting attention and affect his performance. He disclosed that the exercise was to enable him know the responsibilities of the directors in their various official capacities and identify the challenges they may be facing in this perspective.

Bishop Isizoh also used the occasion to remind the



Bishop Denis Isizoh

directors of the need to have all the various organs of Signis Nigeria established in their various dioceses and effectively mentor them to efficiency and the standard required, to make the communication apostolate of the Church in the country more vibrant and service delivery oriented in all ramifications. On the use of the social media to boost the evangelization mission of the Church, Bishop Isizoh called on the directors and all Catholic Media Professionals and practitioners to maximize the opportunities at their disposal in this respect.

Earlier in his homily at the opening Mass, the Bishop of Warri Diocese, Most Rev. John Afareha called on Catholic media practitioners to impact positively to enhance the structure of Nigeria holistically. In this perspective, he called for authentic websites devoid of fake information or news, initiated by the association of Catholic Media professionals and practitioners adding that this could positively effect changes that could meaningfully enhance the holistic structure of the Nigerian nation.

Noting that the mass media in the country has been effective as seen from the several strides she has recorded, Bishop Afareha told the directors: "You could effect meaningful and impactful changes to the holistic structure of Nigeria: from security, formulation of economic policies, and gathering of national statistics in all strata in Nigeria". The Bishop added that "Through modern means of communication, the social communication department could contribute her quota to nation building;" as well as use all available means of communication, including the social media to reach-out with the Good News of Christ.

In his address, the National Director of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu expressed concern at the proliferation

COMMUNICATIONS' DIRECTORS MEETING IN WARRI IN PICTURES



The Bishop of Warri Diocese, Most. Rev. John Afareha (middle) presiding at the opening Mass. Left is Most Rev. Denis Isizoh, CBCN Chairman for Social Communications while right is Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan, President of the Directors Association.



Some of the directors at the opening Mass.



Cross section of the Directors at the opening Mass



Another group of the directors at the opening Mass



The Directors inside the bus taking them on excursion to the Palace of Olu of Warri



The Directors at the Palace of Olu of Warri



Director of Communications, Warri Diocese, Rev. Fr. Benedict Ukutegbe introducing the Directors to the Olu of Warri.



Some of the Directors in a group photograph with the Olu of Warri Oba and some of his High Chiefs

COMMUNICATIONS' DIRECTORS MEETING IN WARRI IN PICTURES



L-R: Bishop Denis Isizoh, Auxillary Bishop of Onitsha and CBCN Social Communications Episcopal Chairman and the Local Ordinary of Warri Diocese, Most. Rev. John Afareha at the celebration of the opening Mass.



Most. Rev. Denis Isizoh saying the opening prayer at the opening ceremony. He is flanked by the President of the Association, Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan (left) and the Vice President, Rev. Sr. Josephine Odorwike, EHJ (right)



The association's President, Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan flanked by two other diocesan Directors during the celebration of the morning Mass on the second day of the meeting



The President, Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan (First from left) Fr's Vincent Chukwuma and Leo Aregbesola during the lecture session.



L-R: CSN Staff at the Plenary: Emmanuel Eko, Fidelia Angbalaga (Miss), Lucy Arogundade (Mrs) and Mr Johnpaul Onyeneke



CSN Director of Social Communications, Rev. Fr. Dr. Chris Anyanwu addressing the Directors.



The Choir of Warri Diocese singing at the opening Mass



Group Photograph of the Directors with the Bishops after the celebration of the opening Mass.

FR. WALTER IHEJIRIKA'S SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY IN PICTURES



of the profession of journalism in the country, stressing that the issue should be addressed to sustain the integrity of the profession. He reminded the directors of the need for them to be more effective in their work; saying: "The Church in Nigeria needs to be more visible and better propagated for the people to understand and embrace her teachings."

Speaking on the theme of the meeting; Communications Media and Security in Nigeria, the CSN director declared: "We must underscore the fact that as Communications Directors and Media practitioners, we have a role to play in the improvement of our national security."

In his welcome address, the President of the association Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan noted that the theme chosen by the host diocese for the plenary: Communications Media and Security in Nigeria, could not have come at a better time than now; considering the unfortunate and embarrassing state of insecurity in all parts of the country; including the general misuse of the social media vis-à-vis physical and social/Cyber insecurity in the society.

He prayed that the members of the association would be guided, directed and influenced by the knowledge that had been imparted on them through the lectures and the practical workshops. He remarked: "Beloved brothers and sisters, the ball is now in our courts; let us play according to the rules and guidelines for the good of the Church and our people."

The host director, Rev. Fr. Benedict Ukutegbe, while welcoming the directors to the meeting, noted that the issue of security in the country is on the front burner of "our collective national consciousness". He added: "There are reports of insecurity littered all over our communications media space on weekly if not daily basis." He also noted the "insidious and treacherous threat to security that is growing maliciously especially among the youth".

In the communique issued at the end of the meeting, the directors resolved to, among others: "Take more seriously the issue of cyber security by training Church personnel on ways of responding to the challenge of cyber insecurity; invest in training young people in on-line realities, digital skills, software expertise and establish a credible data bank for the Church in Nigeria to provide credible information within and outside of the Church".

Other resolutions were: to create and encourage valuable online presence and exploit the numerous opportunities for evangelization and business prospects; form and consolidate functional structures as a better approach to engage the youths profitably; work towards establishing media houses – television and radio stations to educate the populace and mould public opinion. The directors noted that: "Security being a public good, there is great need to approach the issue as a shared responsibility and partner with government at all levels. The communique was signed by Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan and Rev. Fr. Benedict Achi, National President and National Secretary of the associations, respectively.



Very Rev. Fr. Walter Ihejirika, President SIGNIS Africa

SIGNIS Africa plans Special Workshop on Catholic Communication

As part of the activities of the umbrella body for the Church communications apostolate in Africa – Signis Africa, the body has lined out activities for the year 2020 to enhance the communications apostolate of the Church in the continent.

According to the programme released by the national executive board, a three-in-one event slated for May, this year will hold in Nairobi, Kenya. The programme in respect of the event, for which the board has invited all communicators of affiliate countries to participate is detailed below.

a) A Workshop to examine the state of Catholic communication in the continent: This will involve a practical examination of the current situation of Catholic Communication through paper presentations from different parts of the continent. b) A workshop to provide practical strategies to organise fundraising for the communication apostolate of the church: Officials from SIGNIS SERVICES, Rome, and other experts in fund-raising activities will provide practical training on strategies for raising funds for communication activities.

b) We will also have a practical know-how on the use of the SIGNIS Online platform for OPPE Project Application (C.) A Celebration and honouring of Rev. Prof Robert A. White, SJ for his wonderful contributions to Catholic communication education in Africa. (This will be the first in a series of SIGNIS-Africa Honours to be conferred on notable figures who have made significant contributions to the Communication Apostolate in the African Church.

Expected Participants are: National and Diocesan Directors of Communications Directors and Managers of Catholic Media Centres and Institutes Catholic Communication Scholars and Researchers Catholic Journalists and Media Professionals Interested non-Catholic scholars and researchers

According to the release, SIGNIS-Africa will provide room and board for the duration of the events, while individual participants will take care of their transportation to Kenya. Interested communicators are expected to contact: Fr. Walter C. Ihejirika –President, SIGNIS-Africa Walter.ihejirika@uniport.edu.ng; and Fr. Kofi D. Davor – Secretary General, SIGNIS-Africa. dieudonne.kofi@gmail.com Deadline for expression of interest is 15th March, 2020.

CAMPAN outlines how New Media can make Church more Vibrant

The second National Convention of the Catholic Media Practitioners Association (CAMPAN), took place in Jos, capital of Plateau State in September 2019 at the Sacred Heart Pastoral Centre, with about 60 delegates from the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces of the country in attendance. The theme of the convention was: The New Media and Evangelization in Nigeria; A Reflection; and the guest speakers were: Monsignor Cletus Gotan, the Vicar General of Jos Ecclesiastical Province who spoke on the Challenges and Opportunities of New Media Evangelization; and Rev. Fr. Gabriel Gowok of the University of Jos whose presentation was premised on: The New Media and Evangelization in Nigeria: A reflection

In the communique containing the resolutions of the convention issued at the end of the four-day deliberations, it was the consensus of the delegates that; the evangelization mission of the Church can be made more vibrant and effective through the positive use of the new media. The statement signed by Mr. Patrick Osu and Mr. Peter Dada, National President and National Secretary of the association respectively; noted that the delegates after an extensive discussion on Christian evangelization in the digital age; supported the use of the new media for the propagation of the Catholic faith to make the world a better place for the common good of humanity. They observed that since the time of the Apostles to the present day, the doctrine and teachings of the Church have remained constant and consistent while "the methodology of evangelization has changed, allowing the adoption of new techniques of proclaiming the Word of God"

The delegates also stressed the need for the Church to reach-out to the youths who are the citizens of the digital age through the new media but called for caution because: "much as the new media

can strengthen the Church's efforts at evangelization, formation and communication, it can as well ruin the Church; if it is not used positively". They called on all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country to key-in into the new media evangelization process by updating their communication equipment in the context of modern technology; support CAMPAN members in all ramifications to enable them operate effectively in the digital era; deployment of priests who have passion for communication to head Archdiocesan and diocesan communications offices; and adequate training for diocesan directors. The delegates were also addressed by the then Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, who urged them to mobilize ways and means that will ensure the survival of diocesan newspapers and other publications of the Church, for the promotion of the evangelization apostolate within and outside the Church. He also admonished them to "use the new media to improve the society and propagate the faith and promote positive values and teachings of the Church. I assure you of the Bishops' support and solidarity. I ask you to intensify your efforts in this respect, wherever you come from or in your diocese."

In his own address, the Director of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Chris Anayanwu described communication as an essential tool for building relationship; and urged CAMPAN members to live up to expectation in their apostolate for the benefit of the Church and the common good. In his welcome address at the opening ceremony, the National President of the association, Mr. Patrick Osu stated that the theme for the convention had been carefully chosen "to align with our current state of global media exigencies and seek for practical ways to rejuvenate our role and obligation towards the propagation of the truth, peace and justice."

Present at the opening ceremony of the convention were: Rev. Fr. Patrick Alumuku, President Signis Nigeria; Rev. Fr. Joseph Oscar Pam, director for Jos Archdiocese; Rev. Fr. Chris Omotosho, Sokoto Diocese; Rev. Fr. Justine Dyikuk, Bauchi Diocese and Rev. Fr. Andrew Kim, Assistant Director of Communication, Pankshin Diocese. Also in attendance were: His Royal Highness, Miskoom Martins Shaldas III, the Long Geomai of Shendam; while the Ujah of Anaguta, Chief Yakubu Shshok who represented the traditional ruler of Naraguta; Mrs. Veronica Dewa, who represented the Minister of Women Affairs, Dame Pauline Tallen and representatives of the State Commissioner of Police and Commandant of the Federal Road Safety Corps.

"Go, the Lord will be with you"

(Being abstract of the homily of Rev. Fr. Dr. Chris N Anyanwu, the Deputy Secretary General of Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, to mark the end of the Beginning –of –the year Novena 14-22 January 2020 Retreat, given on Friday, 22, 2020 at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria).

We declared 2020 as a year of Vision and Mission. In our prayers we asked God to make our visions into a mission. In other words, whatever vision, plan or dream we have must be actualized this year. We recognize the fact the year 2020 is very unique and perfect, even in the way we write it and pronounce it. What that means is that God will perfect this year for us in our lives, in our families, in work, career and business.

We understand the fact that 365 days that make up the year is very long for any of us to work alone. We need God who knows the road and the way better to accompany and direct us on our journey.

That is why throughout the nine days, we came to him with gratitude. We placed before him our anxieties, our fears, our plans, our sins and brokenness. We wrote our petitions which came from the depths our hearts. Some of our petitions expressed our plans and what we expect God to do for us as well as our resolutions of commitment to God. We fasted and made sacrifices these nine days.

Those sacrifices made in the name of the Lord will not be in vain.

God spoke to us using his priests throughout the nine days.

On the first day, we were told that the Lord will remember us this year, just as he remembered the cry of Hannah in the book of Samuel. And if God remembers you, you must do well not to fail to remember others around. In other words, if you receive blessing from the Lord, that blessing must reach people around us.

On the second day, we were told to learn to hear what the Lord is saying to

us, like the experience of Samuel in the Scriptures. God has a message for us in every circumstances of our lives.

Often times we have the tendency to choose what we want to hear from God. It is only when we develop the altitude of listening to God that we can put to action what we have heard.

On the third day, we were encouraged to learn to appreciate the spiritual resources that we have around us. We have the presence and power of God within us. We should not take the presence of God for granted.

On the fourth day, we were asked to submit ourselves to the authority and power of God. There is nothing impossible for God to do in our lives.

On the fifth day, we are told to come to God with humility to have our sins forgiven. We are sinners in need of God's forgiveness. It is in our sinfulness that we can recognize the presence of God. Christ has come so that we may have life and have it in abundance.

On the sixth day, we were told, to rely on God and remain in his hands so that we can be saved. This is because there is no better place to be saved except in God's hands. God has made investment in each of us. He expects his return of investments—total commitments to God's will.

On the seventh day, we were told to have the same mind as Christ. Christ has a good mind, a forgiving mind, a humble mind, a caring mind and loving mind. Following the attributes of Christ is what truly makes us Christians.

On the eighth day, we were told we shall be the point of reference by God in this new year. In order words, the grace of God will locate us, but we must learn to accept whatever happens to us, whether good or bad as the will of God. God knows what is the best for us.

Today, we are commissioned to go, because the Lord will be with us.

FR. CHRIS ANYANWU'S SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY



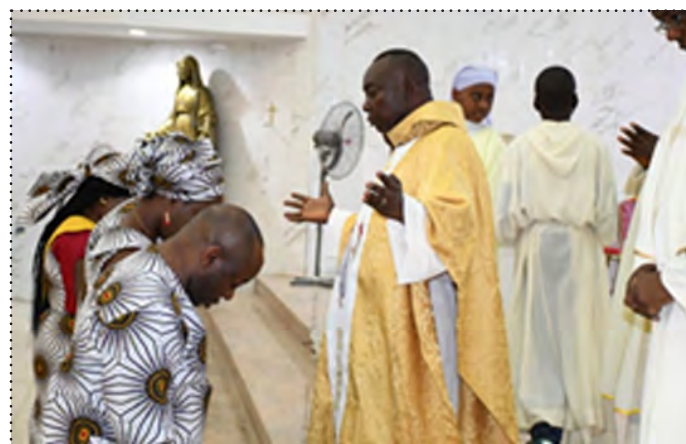
Rev. Fr. Anyanwu flanked by Msgr. Maru and Rev. Fr. Anderson of Port Harcourt Diocese



Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi praying for the celebrant at the Mass



A cross section of CSN Priests at the Mass



Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu praying for his family members



Mrs Agnes Odido and her sister at the Mass



A cross section of guests at the Mass



Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi blessing the congregation during the thanksgiving



Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu poses for group photograph after Mass with Hon. Dakuku Peterside and others.

FR. CHRIS ANYANWU'S SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY



Rev. Fr. Anyanwu making a vote of thanks after Mass



Mr and Mrs. Leonard Anyanwu at the Mass.



Patricia and Marilyn Arogundade, Mrs. Ramatu Joseph and a guest at the occasion.



Mr. Emmanuel Adejo and others at Mass



Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu flanked by Sr. Chidalu Ohalette, PHJC Director of Communication and other Sr at the reception



Rev. Fr. Chris and Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi at the reception.



Rev. Fr. Chris in a photograph with Parishioners of Holy Cross Church, Apo



Two of the special guests at the reception.

Fr. Chris Anyanwu turns 25 as A Priest in the Lord's Vineyard

• *Launches Okogba Education Foundation to Immortalize Father*



Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu flanked by members of the high table cutting the Silver Jubilee Anniversary cake.

The premises of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) was in very festive mood on December 17, 2019; when families, friends, well-wishers and workers of the CSN, CCFN joined the Director of Social Communications, Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu to celebrate his Silver Jubilee, as a Priest in the Lord's vineyard. It was indeed a double celebration as the CSN director, apart from thanking God for keeping faithful to his vocation for two decades plus; also used the occasion to launch the Okogba Education Foundation to immortalize the memory of his father, Pa Sabinus Okogba Anyanwu. The foundation was to bring smile and succour to indigent students who could not realize their education ambition as a result of lack of fund.

The ceremony started with the celebration of the Mass, with Fr. Anyanwu as the chief celebrant, assisted by all the priests in the house and other priests present at the ceremony. In his homily at the Mass, Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi, CBCN Education Committee Secretary spoke on the essence of thanksgiving in the life of man, noting that it is paramount to give thanks to God for all he is doing in our life without demanding anything in return.

Using several readings of the Bible to buttress his point

and why the celebrant had a cause to express gratitude to God the homilist declared: "Like the prophet Jeremiah in Jer. 1:4-10, the Lord said to Fr. Christian, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Like every priest, Christian Anyanwu was chosen, not because of whom or what he is, but in spite of whom and what he is; as the Book of Hebrews 5:4 puts it, "No one takes this honour upon himself but he is called by God, just as Aaron was." Paul confirms this further in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 where he states that God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the Called. Fr. Christian Anyanwu was called exactly twenty-five years ago; he is a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek".

forever, according to the order of Melchizedek".

Fr. Okochi who spoke extensively on who a priest is and in the words of the Bible "as a man of the Word of God; a man chosen and sent by God"; also went down memory lane on the life of the celebrant and how he has meritoriously serve God in humanity in his 25 years in the Lord's vineyard. He also told the congregation of the plan of the celebrant to spend the rest of his life in the service of humanity for the greater glory of God, as he confided in him.

The celebration of the Mass was followed by a lavish reception and the unveiling of the Okogba Education Foundation. The reception was chaired by Sir Emma Mbaka, the Managing Director/CEO of Minfa Ltd and Platinum Mortgage Bank Ltd; while the Minister of Transport, Honourable Rotimi Amaechi performed the official unveiling of the education foundation. Most of the speakers at the celebration commended the celebrant for his invaluable service to humanity as a priest of God and prayed that he would continue to soar higher in the Lord's vineyard while Traditional groups entertained guests at reception while the celebrant was joined by members of the high table to cut the jubilee cake.

FR. CHRIS ANYANWU'S SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY



Rev. Fr. Chris with CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi at the reception



Chairman of the Occasion, Sir Emmanuel Mbaka, giving his opening remarks



Sir Emmanuel Mbaka, Rev. Fr. George Ajana and Msgr. Maru at the reception.



Lady Theodore Innih and her friend at the reception



Minister of Transportation, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi and his friend at the reception



Some of the dignitaries at the occasion



Dignitaries at the occasion



CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi and some guests making a toast of the celebrant.

FR. CHRIS ANYANWU'S SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY



Rev. Fr. Vincent Ogunson and Sir Emmanuel Mbaka, the Chairman of the reception.



Minister of Transportation, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi unveiling the Okogba Foundation



Minister of Transportation, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi (4th from left) and other dignitaries



Rev. Fr. Chris with his brother Leo and his wife, Rose.



Rev. Fr. Charles Ndubuisi pose with Rev. Fr. Chris and Lady Innih.



Rev. Fr. Chris and his friend, Dr. Okey Okechukwu



Rev. Fr. Chris Flanked by Dr. Godwin Ukel (right) and Dr. Okey Okechukwu (left)



Members of a cultural troupe entertaining guest.

EULOGIES AS LATE FR. PIUS UKOR IS LAID TO REST

- 3 Bishops, 460 Priests in attendance
- Peter Obi, Victor Umeh pay last respect

Story by Ononye VC

At exactly 1:02 pm on Wednesday, 7 January 2020, the remains of the late former Director of Social Communications of the Archdiocese of Onitsha and Editor in Chief of Trinitas Newspaper, Very Rev Fr Pius Ukor committed to mother earth at the cemetery of the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha, Anambra State; thus marking the end of the earthly journey an invaluable servant in the vineyard of the Lord, who served the common good of humanity to the greater glory of God.

The final burial rites was witnessed by a large crowd of friends, especially priests and religious from different parts of the country, former Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State, Senator Victor Umeh and High Chief Obiora Okonkwo; family members of the deceased and sympathizers. The ceremony took place at the Holy Trinity Basilica, Onitsha, Anambra State; was presided over by Most Rev. Valerian Okeke, the Archbishop of Onitsha, assisted by Most Rev Michael Odogwu Elue, the Bishop of Isselle Uku Diocese and Most Rev Denis Isizoh, the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha Archdiocese. Over 400 priests from across the country also concelebrated the funeral Mass with the Bishops.

Speaking before the commencement of the funeral Mass, Archbishop Valerian Okeke described the late Rev. Fr. Pius Ukor as an accomplished lover of soccer, such that he died in office as a manager and as a team organizer; and above all, a priest with passion, zeal and commitment for the work of God.

In his homily, Very Rev Fr Johnbosco Okafor in an emotion laden voice described the late FR. Ukor as an accomplished servant of God noting the presence of the crowd at the burial ceremony was a testimony of his commitment to his vocation and service to humanity to the greater glory of God. He commiserated with the mother of the deceased Lady Ukor (LSM) and the family members for their great faith in God and courage in their travails.

The members of the Association of Diocesan/Religious Directors of Social Communications who came from all parts of the country were led by their National President, Rev. Fr Athony Ijasan. The late Fr. Ukor was the immediate past president of the association.

Other groups represented at the burial ceremony were: the Knights and Ladies of the Church Marian Societies, the Legion of Mary, the CWO, led by Dame Ngozi Nwanosike, the CMO, led by Sir Ifeanyi Nnajiaku and the Archdiocesan Laity Council led by Engr Leo Obiefuna.

Many speakers at the burial ceremony eulogized the late Archdiocesan Director of Social Communications for his love and passion for his vocation, friendly disposition to those he came across and dedication to his work and the cause of service to humanity. The late Rev. Fr Pius Ukor slumped and died during a friendly football match between Priests of Isselle-Uku Diocese and their Onitsha Archdiocese counterparts on 4 December, 2019 at Asaba, Delta State. He was aged 48.



Priests from different parts of the country in a procession to the Holy Trinity Basilica, Onitsha; for the funeral Mass for late Rev. Fr. Pius Ukor

LIFE AND TIMES OF LATE FR. PIUS UKOR IN PICTURES



The Archbishop of Onitsha, Most. Rev. Valerian Okeke presiding at the funeral Mass at the Holy Trinity Basilica, Onitsha



Late Fr. Pius Ukor (right) with the CBCN Episcopal Chairman for Social Communications, Bishop Denis Isizoh and the CSN Director of Social Communications, Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu.



Cross section of Rev. Frs. at the funeral Mass



Late Rev. Fr. Pius Ukor (3rd from right) in a group photograph with the Bishop Chairman and other directors at the Ahiara meeting.



Cross section of Rev. Sisters at the funeral Mass at the Holy Trinity Basilica, Onitsha.



Late Fr. Pius Ukor addressing one of the plenary meeting of the Directors of Communications



L-R: Bishop Michael Elue of Isele Uku, Archbishop Valerian Okeke of Onitsha and Bishop Denis Isizoh (Auxillary Bishop of Onitsha) at the funeral Mass.



Late Fr. Pius Ukor with Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, Fr. Femi Adetunji and Rev. Ben Achi during the prayer session at one of the Director's meeting

Family and Human Life Unit

World Congress of Families Regional Conference holds in Accra, Ghana

The Secretary for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Committee on Family and Human Life, Sr. Mary Rosanna Emenusiobi, IHM; accompanied by some diocesan Family and Human Life coordinators in Nigeria, were among the delegates at the regional conference of the World Congress of Families (WCF) held in Accra, Ghana, from October 31 to November 1, 2019. The Conference was organised by Family Renaissance International (Ghana), CitizenGo (Kenya), and Family Watch International (USA). The Family and Human Life Unit (FHLU) of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria. The theme for the conference was: The African Family And Sustainable Development: Strong Families, Strong Nation.

The conference sought to establish an active collaboration with government officials, the media, academia, religious and traditional bodies, civil societies, NGOs and interest group to deliberate intensely on the state of the family and its place in the African states' development. As part of the programme, the organizers on October 30, addressed the Ghanaian Parliament on the issues that weaken African traditional family values and how to confront them.

The theme for the Conference was timely considering the modern day challenges facing human life, marriage, and the family, especially in Africa. Conference speakers were drawn from Africa, Europe, and America. The President of World Congress of Families, Brian Brown, was among the Keynote Speakers. Over 500 participants in attendance listened to quality presentations that revolved around the family and were happy to go home with right tools to



Sr. Mary Rosanna Emenusiobi, IHM (2nd from right) with other members of the Nigerian delegation

tackle these challenges.

Among the highly educative presentations were: Revisiting the Paradigm of Marriage, Family and Parenting for Sustainable Development; The Trends attacking the Natural Family: The LGBTQ Agenda (Legal, Media, Psychiatric, Psychological, Medical Perspectives) and the Un's Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Other presentations, among a total of 15 were: Abortion And Post-Abortion Syndrome, Comprehensive Sexuality Education: African Perspective; Planned Parenthood: Its International Affiliates in Africa and Human Rights and The Family: Myths Vs Facts.

The presentations were not only revelatory, but highly enriching and enlightening. Participants were enthusiastic with strong resolutions to be more proactive in facing these challenges in their respective countries - Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon.

The World Congress of Families is a coalition that promotes Christian rights and values internationally. It brings together all pro-life and pro-family advocates and believers. The core purpose of the co-alition is to deepen the awareness of the importance of families to national and global development. It also seeks to unite and equip leaders, organisations, and families to affirm, celebrate, and defend the natural family (man, woman, and children) as the only fundamental and sustainable unit of society. It organises regional conference for greater participation of groups from that region. This year it was organised for English speaking Africa in Accra, Ghana, from 31st October to 1st November, 2019.



Cross section of participants at the conference. First from right (second row) is Sr. Mary Rosanna Emenusiobi, IHM of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PASTORAL CARE FOR THE ELDERLY HOLDS IN ROME

The Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life at the Vatican, in January organized and international conference on: The Pastoral Care of the Elderly. It was attended by delegates from different parts of the world, including Sr. Mary Rosanna Emenusiobi, IHM; Secretary for CBCN Committee on Family and Human Life in Nigeria. Below is the highlight of her report on the conference which she described as very enriching and educative for the apostolate of taking care of the elderly and apt for application in the African continent.



Sr. Mary Rosanna Emenusiobi of CSN (1st second row) and other delegates at the conference.

From 29th to 31st January, 2020, the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life organised an international conference the Pastoral Care of the Elderly Persons, which took place at the "Augustinianum" Conference Center, Rome, with the theme: "The Richness of Many Years of Life".

According to the Prefect of the Dicastery, Cardinal Kelvin Farrell, who while declaring the conference opened on January 29, reflected on the "demographic revolution" which is affecting the world, of which he saw as "one of the 'Signs of the Times'". He clarified that "we also as a Church cannot fail to take this into account", stressing that "it seems that by the year 2100, 61% of the world's population will be made up of people over sixty-five years of age, and the elderly population will already double in over the next thirty years." All this, he added, "not only has implications of a sociological, economic, anthropological, and political nature, but above all it raises questions and needs of a spiritual character, for which we are obligated to be proactive."

Another reason for the conference, he pointed out was that "we have the sense that the pastoral care of the elderly is a widespread but uneven concern among various local Churches." Therefore, "the choice to create an office dedicated to the pastoral care of the elderly and to convene this conference was born from a desire to promote a new pastoral culture, made up of love and respect for the elderly. To this end, we are committed to beginning a dialogue with our natural interlocutors, i.e. the national episcopal conferences."

"In particular, the pastoral accompaniment which is needed by the elderly," the Prefect explained, "is an obvious need in light of lengthening lifespans. In our society, where the 'throw-away' culture and the marginalization of the vulnerable often dominates the collective imagination as well as family, political, and social choices, the 'richness of many years' is not always welcomed as the blessing of a long life—that is, as a gift." Thus, putting into practice



Cross section of delegates at the conference.

the "pastoral ministry of the ear," he concluded that the meeting "intends to be characterized by a triple form of listening: listening to the signs of the times, listening to the Magisterium, and listening to your experience, to work out together some general guidelines that can be of assistance to dioceses throughout the world."

According to him, the pastoral care of the elderly is something new; and therefore: "We must start a process and set up a dialogue which can only be but a rough draft," in that "our task in these days is to ask ourselves what the outlines for the pastoral care of the elderly might look like. According to him, Pope Francis loves the elderly and, from the beginning of his pontificate, and on numerous occasions, the Pope has emphasised their indispensable role in dialogue with young people, in the transmission of the faith and in the youths' rediscovery of their own roots. He hoped for a renewed ecclesial reflection on what he called "the blessing of a long life." And "when the Pope speaks of the elderly, he speaks of the future and of their valuable role in the Church and in society. This affirms us in our choice to organize the first international conference on the pastoral care of the elderly."

Education Directors, Secretaries hold Annual Convention In Jalingo

The annual convention of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Directors/Secretaries of Education (NACDDED) took place in Jalingo, Taraba State, from the 3rd to the 6th of February 2020 with the theme Nigeria's Education Laws and Policies as It concerns Non-Public Schools in Nigeria. Most of the Archdioceses and dioceses were represented at the event. The Education Secretary, Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi also attended the convention.

The programme started with an opening Mass presided over by the Vicar General, Very Rev. Fr. George Gogo who represented the local ordinary, Most Rev. Charles M. Hammawa. The convention was attended by forty-two (42) Education Directors/ Secretaries from across the dioceses.

In his address at the meeting, the CSN Education Secretary, Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi thanked the diocesan Education Directors/Secretaries for their collaboration with the national office. He gave them an update regarding the activities of the CSN education unit in 2019 and sought for their co-operation in the accomplishment of the proposed 2020 programmes including the academic integrity seminars to be organized in all the ecclesiastical provinces. Fr Okochi also explained the need for diocesan education Directors and Secretaries to collaborate with the health, family/ human life, migration and refugees and JDPC units in their respective dioceses as they all belong to the Church



CSN Education Unit Secretary, Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi addressing the directors and Secretaries of Education at the Convention.

and Society Department. This way of working, he explained, is in accordance with the aims and objectives of the CBCN. He further explained to them that most of the activities of the Education Unit of the CSN will be carried out mostly in the provinces and in the dioceses rather than in Abuja so as to reach as many people as possible.

The NACDDED Chairman, Rev. Fr. Paschal Onwugbenu, in his own address, thanked the CSN Education Secretary for deepening collaboration between the National and the diocesan education offices. He pledged the preparedness of the diocesan Directors and Secretaries to implement the educational policies of the CBCN with utmost vigour.

Elections were held at the convention and new national officers elected as follows: Rev. Fr. Francis Atama (Otukpo diocese) – Chairman; Rev. Fr. Edward Inyanwachi (Abakaliki diocese) - Vice President; Rev. Fr. Chris Inegbenoghu (Abuja Archdiocese) – Secretary; Rev. Fr. Madaki Emmanuel (Kaduna diocese) – Vice Secretary; Rev. Fr. Hilary Nwajagu- Financial Secretary and Rev. Fr. Andrew Igbana (Gboko diocese) – Treasurer.

Call for Equal Opportunities for Children of School Age

An appeal has been made for the collaboration of all stakeholder groups in the country's education sector, to ensure the provision of an holistic policy that will facilitate equal opportunities for all children of school age in the country, irrespective of whether they attend public or private schools.

The appeal was part of the resolutions adopted by the members of the Association of Diocesan Directors/Secretaries of Education at their 2020 Annual Convention held at the St. Charles Borromeo Pastoral Centre, Mile Six, Jalingo, Taraba State; from February 3 to 6, this year. The document was signed by Rev. Fr. Dr. Paschal Onwugbenu and Rev. Sr. Eunice BI (TSF); national chairman and national Secretary of the association, respectively.

In the course of their deliberations, the members affirmed that Catholic education is integral and holistic and that the Church in Nigeria has made tremendous contributions to support the State in the provision of quality education. They however, noted the following: in states where the government has good relationship with faith-based schools, quality of education has improved; frequent harassment through multiple taxation and levies by government officials, stifle growth and generate conflict; the wrong perception of faith-based schools as profit-making ventures robs them of their identity and effectiveness; and Lack of understanding of the clear-cut policies and laws on the operation of not for profit schools by some government

officials leads to confusion.

The participants therefore proffered the following as solutions for addressing the challenges in the country's education sector. These include the urgent need for parents and well-meaning individuals to engage government at all levels, demanding the rights of their children and asking the government to live up to their responsibilities; the rights of non-public schools to operate should be supported with adequate provisions, as enshrined in the Universal Basic Education (UBE); and urged faith-based schools to use all legitimate forms of advocacy aimed at securing legislation and practices that would help to promote the attainment of Educational Goals in Nigeria.

Other resolutions adopted were: Government should extend assistance to children in non-public schools as they are also bona fide citizens of the State, if schools are to serve the interest of the society; all stakeholders should collaborate with government and faith-based providers of education to improve the quality of education for the Nigerian child; State educational laws should be reviewed to address present challenges and realities of citizens especially in non-public schools and government at all levels should do everything legally possible to curb insurgency in the country and create enabling environment for the Nigerian child to attain academic excellence.

The Association concluded that the conference is optimistic that the implementation of these resolutions will bring about the desired goal of educating the Nigerian child.

“National Policy On Catechesis, An Imperative Need For The Church In Nigeria”

The association of Catholic Theologians of the Southwest region held their 2019 Annual General Meeting (AGM), at the Saints Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo State. The Secretary to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Committee on Religious Education, Biblical Apostolate and Catechesis, Mr. Femi Adejo was one of the key speakers at the programme.

In his paper titled: Catechesis in the Church in Nigeria: From policy to Implementation – A Biblical Path; The CBCN Committee Secretary stressing the need for a national policy on Catechesis for the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the country emphasized that: “Catechetical instruction illumines and strengthens the faith, develops a life in harmony with the spirit of Christ; stimulates a conscious and fervent participation in the liturgical mystery.” He added that Catechesis is an integral formation – open to all other factors of Christian life, cultivates celebration, living and translating them into dynamic virtues; promoting knowledge of the faith, the liturgy and moral formation.

According to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) Unit Secretary; a national policy on Catechesis will facilitate its teaching and understanding by the faithful as well as enhance the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the country. According to him: “We do not have a uniform policy yet in Nigeria. Up till now, we hook on to those universal norms and policies. This was one of the reasons for the 1st National Catechetical Summit of 2018 - to have a working catechetical policy for the Church in Nigeria.”

Mr. Adejo in his presentation highlighted some of the areas the national policy will focus on and called on the Theologians of the Church in the country to give the issue the priority attention it deserves, to help the Church in the country. His submission focused on the general appraisal of Catechesis in the life of the Church; object and definitive aim of catechesis; the task of catechesis and fundamental tasks of catechesis which include: promoting knowledge, liturgical education; moral formation and teaching to pray.

CALL FOR CONCERTED EFFORTS ON KNOWLEDGE OF CATECHESIS

Concerted efforts at enhancing the knowledge of Catechesis by the faithful will enhance moral development and mature moral values of the faithful. This assertion was contained in the communique issued at the end of the study of Pope Francis Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, by Priests, Religious and Catechists of the Abuja Ecclesiastical Province, at the Pope John II Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, Benue State.

The communique signed by all the participants at the 3-day seminar, extensively studied the document of the Holy Father under the supervision of Bishop Wilfred Anagbe CMF, the Abuja Provincial Liaison Bishop on New Evangelization Commission and the Catholic Bishop of Makurdi Diocese. The programme was facilitated by Mr. Femi Adejo, Secretary, CBCN Episcopal Committee on Biblical Apostolate, Catechesis, Religious Education and New Evangelization Commission.

Among other things, the participants affirmed the



Mr. Femi Adejo

Other areas addressed by the speaker included: the Church and Catechesis, stressing that catechesis is an ecclesial action; “as such the Church has always looked on catechesis as a sacred duty and an inalienable right;” Catechesis and the Church in Nigeria and the Biblical X-ray to keep Catechesis in shape.

The CSN Catechesis Unit Secretary concluded: “Catechesis must therefore be a tool at the service of the Christian community in our encounter with both believers and all those who are searching for the meaning of life. Catechesis must be developed and expressed in missionary context so as to impress on our active participants of the Christian community the urgent need to recover the power of the Gospel message.”

important role of the laity in the missionary work of the Church in Nigeria and therefore advocated that more resources should be invested in the training and support of Catechists and other pastoral agents.

While acknowledging the challenging circumstances the Church is facing in the country at proclaiming the Good News as occasioned by: high rate of poverty, illiteracy, corruption, insecurity and poor governance; the participants expressed optimism that the proclamation of this Good News should restore hope to the hopeless, and bring comfort to the afflicted without excluding any one. Other decisions of the participants included: constant renewal as a paramount tool for the development and strengthening of faith. They therefore recommended constant formation and training of the faithful in this perspective, through seminars and workshops. They concluded that: “The high levels of violence and conflicts in the Nigerian society require dialogue as the Christian faith is a Gospel of Peace through dialogue.”

Plans To Revitalise Liturgical Music In Nigeria

The impact of distorted liturgy is not in the interest of the Mass celebration and evangelization apostolate of the Church and all hands are now on deck to ameliorate the situation; and this was the primary focus of the discussion at the 10th anniversary celebration of the National Conference of the National Catholic Liturgical Music Council of Nigeria (NACALIMCO); held in Gboko, Benue State, last year. This concern was expressed by the national chaplain of the association, Rev. Fr. Moses Iyara OSA, while speaking on the efforts to revitalize the association and sustain the tradition and integrity of the liturgy in the Church. The National Director spoke extensively on the outcome of the meeting and expressed gratitude to the local ordinary of Gboko Diocese, Most Rev. William Avenya, who, according to him spoke the mind of the Church on the distortion of liturgical music in his keynote address at the anniversary celebration. It will be recalled that Bishop Avenya in his keynote address at the opening ceremony that followed the celebration of the opening Mass, at the four-day conference, held at the Holy Rosary School Gboko, expressed concern at the lackadaisical attitude of some choir groups to the relevance of liturgical music in the life of the Church.

Speaking on the theme of the conference and the importance of Liturgical music in the life of the Church, Bishop Avenya noted that: "The musical tradition of the Church in which prayer is offered in a unique way is being distorted with a lot of abuses and deviations in contemporary times. While noting that music in the church is fast losing its meaning as they lacked liturgical and theological depth, caused by the escapades of most composers who have not been properly trained in musical, liturgical or theological composition, the Bishop declared: "Adoption of musical styles that are contrary to the norms of divine worship is gradually becoming the order of the day in contemporary worship."

In his paper titled: : Let us Sing Our Faith, the national chaplain of the association, Rev. Fr. Moses Iyara OSA, the National Chaplain of the National Catholic Liturgical Music Council of Nigeria (NACALIMCO); in his presentation at the 10th Annual National Conference of the of

the association, held recently at the Queen of the Holy Rosary School, Gboko, Benue State.

In his paper titled: Let us Sing Our Faith; Fr. Iyara noted how the lyrics of some Commons of the liturgy have been distorted out of the lyrics of the liturgical texts by music masters or leaders of choirs, in the attempt to modernize the songs of the Church, in spite of the position of the Church on the tradition of the lyrics of these songs. He listed the affected songs to include: the Kyrie, the Gloria and Pater Noster.

The association's National Chaplain expressed concern that " ... most disturbing deviation, is the distortion of the lyrics of our liturgical text, which many of us have unknowingly accepted, and even celebrated, by what I would like to describe as the poetic trivialization of the Common parts of the Mass e.g. the Kyrie – Lord have mercy; Gloria – Glory be to God; Pater Noster – Our Father; Nice Creed – I believe in God ; Sanctus – Holy holy holy and Agnus Dei – Lamb of God."

Fr. Iyara noted: "The texts of these Commons have been well formulated biblically and theologically over the centuries, in their proper order to reflect the teaching and faith of the Church. But unfortunately, what we observe today is that in the course of trying to use poetry or poetic license to simplify the Commons, we have resorted to distorting their meanings completely." Stressing the need for the Church in Nigeria to be in conformity with the Universal Church in the realm of the liturgy and liturgical songs, Fr. Iyara stressed the need for the anomaly to be properly addressed and corrected.

At the end of the four-day programme, which featured presentations by experts and election of national officers, the participants issued a communique containing their resolutions and made recommendations on how to enhance the activities of the association in the country. The document was signed by Rev. Fr. Moses Iyara OSA, National Chaplain; Mr. Aniemek Hyacinth Peter, National Coordinator; Sir Jude Nnam, National Music Director and Mr. Ike Emmanuel Nwachukwu, National Secretary.

The communiqué issued at the end of the conference noted that the participants appraised the performance of Liturgical Music across the country, identified areas of strength and



Diocesan Priest Chaplains of Catholic Choristers pose with the National Chaplain Fr. Moses Iyara (OSA) (3rd from left) after the opening Mass of the 10th NACALIMCON CONFERENCE in Gboko, 6th Nov. 2019.



Group photograph of delegate choristers from the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces and their diocesan priest chaplains after the opening Mass of the 10th NACALIMCON conference held in Gboko.

weaknesses and gave directives on how to improve on the identified lapses in accordance with the guidelines of the Church's official documents on liturgical music. The communiqué was jointly signed by: Rev. Fr. Moses Ewrolyara OSA; National Chaplain; Mr. Aniameke Hyacinth Peter, National Coordinator; Sir. Jude Nnam, National Music Director and Mr. Ike Emmanuel Nwachukwu, National Secretary.

The participants also noted with deep concern the poor zeal at which choir leaders strive to implement the recommendations made at previous conferences to enrich liturgical music in the church. They discussed extensively the abuse of some basic norms of liturgical music in conjunction with presentations delivered by experts and proffered solutions at addressing the identified challenges. They also stressed the importance of training of choir masters for the sustenance of the sacredness of liturgical music of the Church. They commended choir masters who have signified intention to study music and commended those who have obtained certificate in this respect.

They declared: "We recognize the need to collaborate with these musicologists or experts with formal education in music in order to improve our choir ministry."

Members of the association were also admonished to study liturgical music in any certified Catholic music academy to enhance their mastery of the art. They identified and accepted the sharp difference between

the worshipping congregation with liturgical music and not to entertain

The participants considered the need for some committees to streamline the activities of members of the association in the Archdioceses and dioceses as well as setting up a music commission and urged choirs to shun singing beyond liturgical actions. The conference was attended by over 500 participants from all the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces in the country.

At the elections, Mr. Anieke Hyacinth Peter emerged as the new National Coordinator; Mr. Leo Ogu, National Vice Coordinator 1; Mr. Raymond Udoh, National Vice Coordinator 2; Sir Dr. Jude Nnam, National Music Director; Mr. Joseph Usukumah, National Deputy Music Director and Mr. Ike Nwachukwu, National Secretary. Other officers elected were: Mr. Hilary Osifo, National Assistant Secretary; Mrs. Maryann Didugwu, National Financial Secretary; Mr. Daniel Akpan, National Treasurer; Mrs. Victoria Aikokpodion, National Welfare Officer 1; Mr. Julius Pwajok, National Welfare Officer 2; Mr. Johnbosco Udeogwu, National Provost 1, Mr. Festus Oriafu, National Provost 2 and Mr. Linus Akpan, National Public Relations Officer (PRO).

The conference was attended by over 500 delegates from all the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces of the Church in the country while the theme was: Mediocrity and Superficiality: Addressing Issues of Inconsistencies with Contemporary Liturgical Music in Nigeria. NACALIMCO is the umbrella body for Catholic choristers in the country.

Liturgical Music/songs and Sacred Christian songs; noting that "the ignorance of this fundamental fact is what is practically responsible for so many digressions by choristers, composers who make arbitrary selections and compositions of songs for Liturgical celebrations". The participants therefore made it compulsory for anyone who wants to be a Music Director/Choir Master in the country must have formal and proper training in Liturgical Music.

Other decisions taken at the conference included: the call on all choirs in the country to end distortion and deviation from the tradition of the Church in respect of singing the lyrics of the Commons of the Mass "in order to safeguard their theological meaning and our liturgical heritage" and that the primary role of the choir is to animate

The texts of these Commons have been well formulated biblically and theologically over the centuries, in their proper order to reflect the teaching and faith of the Church. But unfortunately, what we observe today is that in the course of trying to use poetry or poetic license to simplify the Commons, we have resorted to distorting their meanings completely

2020 National Festival of Arts and Culture to hold in Calabar

Plans are in top gear to host the next National Festival of Arts and Culture (NACAFAC), in November, this year, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Secretary for Inculturation and Translation, Rev. Fr. Moses Iyara OSA, has disclosed. Fr. Iyara who made the disclosure during an exclusive interview with CSN News Magazine, in His office in Abuja, noted that the CSN has been in working collaboration with the Archdiocesan and diocesan directors and coordinators of Inculturation and Translation and a suitable programme for the festival in consonance with the inculturation disposition of the Universal Church is being worked out. He added that several meetings have been held since the last festival held in Benin City in August 2016 while the last two meetings held in Calabar and Uyo have really fine-tuned the plans for the festival, which is the third in the series.

Briefing CSN News magazine on the general frame work of the festival to hold in Calabar, Cross Rivers State, FR. Iyara disclosed that the theme for the festival is: Celebrating the Gift of Life in Traditional Naming Ceremony – A Focus on the Rite of Baptism. While giving the background for the theme of the celebration (NACAFAC 3), Fr. Iyara gave the summary content of the festival to include: paper presentation, drama presentation, traditional dance, African poetry, art exhibition



Rev. Fr. Moses Iyara, OSA

and music rendition.

The CSN Unit Secretary stated that Inculturation is not a once and for all programme; adding: "It is an on-going search for Christo-centric meanings within diverse traditions, customs and culture of the people." He added: After over ten decades of Catholicism in Nigeria, the Christian faith is yet to take deep roots in the soil of our peoples' culture". He concluded that the festival is one of the programmes put in place by the CBCN to address this trending challenge.

CSN LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP FOR LEADERS OF LAY APOSTOLATE GROUPS



Some Knights of St. John Int'l and their Auxilliaries at the workshop



Secretary, Holy Family Society with other participants at the training workshop



Participants listening to the Lecture on Emotional Intelligence by Rev. Fr. George Ehusani



Rev. Fr. Mark Obayi, National Youth Animator making his presentation on 'Youth Development/Empowerment'

CSN organizes training workshop for leaders of Laity Groups

The continued formation of the faithful of the Church is one of the primary evangelization goals of the Pastoral Agents department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); and in this perspective, the department has put in place a series of training programmes for the leadership of the laity groups of the Church at the national level, with the expectation that this will be stepped down in the dioceses for grassroots implementation. At the programme organized by the department at the CSN Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja, leaders of the various pious organizations and other societies were thoroughly up graded in the teachings and tenets of the Church.

The programme which was attended by about 87 leaders of the various laity groups of the Church from all the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces in the country had: **"Effective Apostolate of the Laity for the Promotion of Christian values and Evangelization"**, as its theme. In his homily at the celebration of the Mass. on the first day of the Programme, the participants were told that Christianity premised on prosperity and desire for the mundane things of the world are not in conformity with the teachings and concept of our Lord Jesus Christ. The admonition was given by the Catholic Bishop of Kano, Most Rev. John Niyiring OSA, in his homily at the celebration of the opening Mass.

Bishop Niyiring who is the Episcopal Chairman of the CBCN Laity Committee expressed concern on the emphasis on the Gospel of prosperity by leaders of contemporary Christian Churches, pointing out that this was not the primary mission of the Church of Christ. Urging the participants to engage in self-examination of conscience on their relationship with fellow human beings, the bishop stated: "If our Christianity is only premised on the basis of what we get from God, then we have missed the essence of Christianity and salvation".

He reiterated the need for all to make a conscious decision on "whether or not we want to follow Jesus and when we do chose to follow Him, we must be ready and willing to carry our crosses". According to the Bishop Chairman, in all decisions of following Jesus, the essence is the love of God and neighbour; adding that we all must be Christ-like in our attitudes to merit the name of Christian. He enjoined all the delegates to endeavor to live a true Catholic Christian life irrespective of the various challenges faced.

In his keynote address at the opening ceremony of the workshop, Bishop Niyiring enjoined the participants to endeavor to foster unity in diversity, adding that by virtue of their Baptism, they are all individually and collectively agents of pastoral care.

In his presentation titled: **Effective Apostolate of the Laity for the Promotion of Christian Values and Evangelization**, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu, CSN Director of the Pastoral Agents department at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), described effective communication as a vital tool for the evangelization apostolate of the laity in the Church. He described effective communication skills as essential tools for enhancing leadership.

Outlining the various ways and methods this can be used in this perspective, the CSN Director noted that the training programme was to enable the participants to understand the meaning of communication, appreciate its importance and identify common barriers in order to be able to communicate more effectively in their roles as leaders of the lay faithful in the Church.



Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu

Various means of communications identified by Fr. Dugu include: signs, writing, music, gong and the present day means of information technology like the social media and internet, among others. He noted the gradual development in the means of communications from the olden days to the present-day era, stressing the need for Church leaders to be vast in these means of communication to be able to communicate effectively with their followers and discharge their evangelization apostolate effectively in the community.

The CSN director advised leaders of the various laity groups of the Church in the country to communicate effectively with their members as this will go a long way in enhancing the evangelization apostolate of the Church and the collaborative efforts of all the faithful, irrespective of their personal passion and charism.

Other speakers at the programme included a former President of the National Laity Council, Sir John Bagu whose presentation centred on an assessment of the working relationship between the lay groups and the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria.

In the communiqué issued at the end of the workshop, the participants agreed among other things that: there is need for the laity to promote peace and love within and outside the church; that the laity should be properly equipped with information regarding their roles and responsibilities; that the workshop has helped to clear all the grey areas of "our Christian lives" and gave their unalloyed consent to the one-term tenure endorsed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); for executives of all laity groups.

Also, the participants agreed that desire for leadership positions for Church groups should be sought with the desire to serve and not for personal gains; that lay faithful must eschew all activities and actions that will bring about rancor or disunity in the church; that all lay faithful should embrace the true life of Christianity in all ramifications; support their Chaplains and the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); acknowledge the CSN as the symbol of unity of the Bishops Conference as it coordinates the activities of the Church in the country as well as embrace their responsibilities as Christians in the family, the Church and the society.

PHOTO NEWS

CSN LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP FOR LEADERS OF LAY APOSTOLATE GROUPS



National Secretary, Catholic Nurses Guild and other Women at the workshop.



Most. Rev. John Niyiring OSA, Bishop of Kano/Episcopal Chairman for Laity, making his opening remarks.



Participants at the training workshop



Secretary, CBCN Laity Committee with other participants during the Group discussion.



Some of the participants during one of the lecture sessions.



From right KSM and other Lay participants in rapt attention.



Some Knights of St. John Int'l at the workshop



Group Discussion.

BISHOPS CONVERGE IN ABUJA FOR 2020 FIRST PLENARY

• Theme: The Word of God: A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path

The first Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for this year, began in Abuja on Sunday March 1, with about 60 Bishops in attendance. The plenary, which is being held at the CSN Resource Centre, Durumi Abuja, began with the celebration of the Mass at the St. Gabriel Chaplaincy, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi; at 9am, with the President of the Conference, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze presiding. It was attended by the Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi and the Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Oshinbajo; among other dignitaries from all walks of life.

In his homily, the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama; spoke extensively on the negative impact of sin in the life of man, and the consequences in terms of man's relationship with God and fellow human being. Going down memory lane; from the time of our first parents, Adam and Eve; Archbishop Kaigama declared: "The disobedience of Adam and Eve, not only destroyed their good relationship with God but also wounded their relationship with each other, which explains why there is today in the world so much unbelievable and atrocious demonstration of inhumanity and a terrible deficiency of charity. He however added that the redemptive mission of Christ has given us the invaluable opportunity for repentance and "acquire the moral strength and spiritual capacity to repel the forces of the evil one and his agents through the Word of God. He therefore urged the people to take advantage of the present Lenten Season to seek reconciliation and forgiveness for the wrongs we have committed.

Relating this situation to the state of the Nigerian Nation; Archbishop Kaigama declared: "One of our biggest temptations is one of believing our country against all odds. For quite a while now, it appears that it is country's destiny to always dance on the edge of the perilous precipice. Otherwise, how does one explain the uninterrupted movement from one crisis to another? He therefore called for a more pragmatic approach on the part of all Nigerian to salvage the

country from her present predicament with the help of God. The celebration of the Mass was followed by the opening ceremony; at which the President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze declared the Conference open, under the chairmanship of Noble Sir Professor Epiphany Azinge SAN; former Director General of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies.

In his address, which was premised on the theme of the conference, the CBCN President p noted that: "Reading daily of your persecutions because of your faith reminds us that the blood of the martyrs water the seed of faith. The Church grows faster whenever she is persecuted. The CBCN also berated the bastardization of the Liturgy stressing that: "The Sacred Scripture is a complete book consisting of the Old and New Testaments. In the reading and interpretation of Scripture, we must maintain a hermeneutic of continuity.

Archbishop Akubeze noted that the devil ion rampage in the county and said: The fruits of its rule are evident in every sphere of our collective lives as nation. We live at a time where despair and hopelessness are in high supply, and on the flip side, hope is in short supply. He concluded: "Let the Word of God lead Nigeria to become a nation that provides safety for all citizens. A Nation that tallows free expression of religious differences"; among other challenges she is presently facing as a nation.

Goodwill messages wer also received from the Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi; the Chairman of the occasion, Professor Epiphany Azinge; and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria; Sir Dr. Samson Ayokunle.

In the afternoon, the Bishops led the faithful on a prayer protest march from the Christian Ecumenical Centre to the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral, to conclude with the Benediction, after which the President of the Conference read the message of the conference on the devastating effects of insecurity in the country. The Plenary was rounded up with the celebration of the Mass at which the communique was read.

LEADERSHIP ANIMATION WORKSHOP FOR CWO OFFICERS



Bishop Anslem Umoren (centre) presiding at the opening Mass of the CWO Animation Workshop in Abuja.



CSN Director of Pastoral Agents, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu addressing the participants before the beginning of the programme.



The President of the association, Mrs. Okolo addressing the participants.



Bishop Anslem Umoren in a group photograph with the CWO Chaplains after the celebration of the Mass.

Animation Training organized for CWO Leaders

In the effort to make leaders of the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) more effective and vibrant in their evangelization apostolate and leadership quality, the national office of the association recently collaborated with the Department of Pastoral Agents, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), to organize a missionary animation seminar for the Chaplains, Sister Advisers, provincial and diocesan leaders of the association in the country. The four-day programme, which took place at the Resource Centre of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Durumi, Abuja, in January this year, started with the celebration of the Mass.

Addressing the national, provincial and diocesan officers present at the programme, the CSN Director of Pastoral Agents, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu commended the members of the CWO for their vibrant and meaningful presence in the evangelical activities of the Nigeria church at all levels; and for being the pillars of the Church and family in the world. The CSN directors used the opportunity to highlight the challenges inherent in the present day world that are threatening the family globally, especially the children, and the invaluable roles mothers are expected to play to put their children on the right track and in a Christian way. He spoke extensively on the pastoral care of the family, violence and abuse; noting that holiness of life is one of the premium solutions to these challenges.

While wishing the participants successful deliberations, Fr. Dugu outlined the social challenges in the life of the family which deserve the prompt attention of mothers and concluded that: "the few days of the animation programme would provide ample opportunities to add values to our lives and deepen our encounter with Christ in all the activities". In his own address, the National Chaplain of the organization,

Rev. Fr. Benedict O. Okeke noted that the animation programme was initiated from the motivation by the formation workshop organized by the CSN Pastoral Agents department for leaders of all laity groups in the country, last year. He added that the programme was share the experiences gained by the leadership of the organization at the national training. Stressing the need for the pastoral animation, the national chaplain declared: "We cannot go too deep without realizing that we must be well prepared for the eventualities of our time. We must get ourselves well prepared therefore, to keep abreast with the signs of the time and be ready to make useful contributions in the world we live and labour".

Fr. Okeke added: "The essence of this programme or seminar is to see how the Chaplains, Sister Advisers and the entire Christian Mothers can deepen our commitments to CWON apostolate for a better catch or result."

Welcoming the participants, the National President, Mrs. Cecilia Nwanneka Okolo in her address outlined some specific areas of the organization's Constitution which needs clarification. She urged the diocesan leaders to help "guide the diocese right" as the organization needs to have order. Other important issues addressed by the National President included: programme on new Evangelization; rejuvenation and revitalizing the CWON; the organization's strategic plan; diocesan Marriage and Family Life Commission and attending provincial and diocesan meetings.

In his animation presentation, the National Chaplain, Rev. Fr. Benedict Okeke spoke on: the need for mission of the Church in our time; what is mission; the meaning of missionary animation; the New Evangelization and formation of the animators.

Among other things, the National Chaplain told the participants that: "Missionary animation is a principal sign of vitality and maturity of any ecclesial community. It fires the individual, family, organization and the community to be in tune with the universal missionary responsibility, to the point of contributing well for the evangelization of the whole Church and the good of humanity."

Ibadan Archdiocese Hosts 47th Annual Conference Of Laity Council

Delegates of the various laity organizations of the Church, under the aegis of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN); converged in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, from 12-15, December last year for the 47th Annual Conference of the association. The ceremony, which had Building A Righteous Nation; The Role of Catholic Lay Faithful took place at the St. Joseph Catholic Church, Oke-Ado, Ibadan. The programme started with an opening Mass.

In his Keynote Address to declare the Conference open, titled: Building A righteous Nations - the Role of the Lay Faithful, the Catholic Archbishop of Ibadan, Most Rev. Gabriel Leke Abegunrin commended the association for putting the growth and development of the country in the front burner of discussion at the conference.

Archbishop Abegunrin spoke extensively on: the task of nation building; deficiency in Nigeria's leadership and followership; and the Catholic laity in politics and nation building. Approving the participation of Catholic laity in politics for the sanitization of the arena, Archbishop Abegunrin urged them to do in conformity with the principles, ethics and guidelines of the Church. In this perspective he admonished Catholics in politics to avoid politics of bitterness and calumny, pay tax regularly, shun lawlessness, promote honesty and integrity and be responsible parents. Using the teachings and documents of the Church to buttress his points, Archbishop Abegunrin wished the delegates successful deliberations, urging them to "let everything be done for God and not for personal gains or materials satisfaction".

In his welcome address, the National President of the association, Sir

Thomas Folu Adekoya spoke on matters relating to the state of the nation with special attention on the persistence of insecurity in the country; the Church and the association; outlining particularly the role of the laity in the mission and apostolate of the Church. Among other things the President declared: "All is far from being well with our country and we must all rise and work to reverse the situation for the better."

Paper presentations were made by Professor Anthony Akinwale OP; the Vice Chancellor of Dominican University, Ibadan; whose paper was titled: The Catholic Lay Faithful as Architects of Nation Building. He spoke extensively on what type of nation that needed to be built, and what type of Catholic laity we need to build the nation we need. He concluded: "Nation building in a country as ours requires Catholic men and women who are wise and courageous." Among other qualities. In his own paper, Professor Isaac Ukpokolo of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan; spoke on the topic Catholic Lay Faithful: Witnessing to Christ in A world of Business and Politics.

At the end of their deliberations, the delegates issued a communique in which they among other things; the recommended the review of the Nigerian Constitution to clearly define the relationship between: the state and the citizens, the citizens and fellow citizens and the different institutions that make up government; the paramount importance of education for nation building and development and the need to build a righteous nation with the involvement of parents in the upbringing of their children as well as making their homes better place for faith formation.

LEADERSHIP ANIMATION WORKSHOP FOR CWO OFFICERS



Concelebrating Chaplains with the Chief Celebrant, Most Rev. Anselm Umoren (6th from right) after the Mass.



Members of the National Executive Committee, CWO with Bishop Anselm Umoren and the National Chaplain Rev. Fr. Benedict Okike



Sister Advisors with the Bishop and the National Chaplain



Some provincial Officers of the CWO with Bishop Umoren



Cross section of some of the participants at the workshop



Some CWO participants with Bishop Umoren

SPECIAL FOCUS ON MISSION AND DIALOGUE DEPARTMENT

By Rev. Fr. Gregory Obanado

The Department of Mission and Dialogue has three units. The Unit for Mission, Unit for Ecumenism, and the Unit for Interreligious Dialogue. The units of the department work under directives of the Catholic Bishops Conference and it make annual reports to the three Vatican Congregation: Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples; The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

The Unit for mission is concerned with the missionary work of the Secretariat. It involves the coordination and organisation of missionaries and their work in Nigeria and abroad. It organises orientation of Missionaries who are going out of the country for missionary work in foreign lands; to prepare them for mission in a new environment and make them conversant with the contemporary situation of the places they are going to work. In other-words, the Unit and the department assist them to be familiar with the political, cultural religious situations of the places they will work. The orientation programme opens to them the way and their manner of interaction in the places in which they will live and work. It highlights the way their new environment could affect them and their missionary work. The Unit also organises orientation for priests and religious who have gone abroad and have returned back to the country at the end of their work outside the country to enable them get used to a new Nigerian environment. Last year's programme was in Makurdi and this year's orientation programme will take place in Enugu in the middle of May. Furthermore, the unit together with other units of the department collaborate with Seminaries and Schools of evangelisation in Nigeria to seek for ways to modernise, equip missionaries, and instruct future missionaries to face the work of evangelisation as missionary priests and religious intending on mission work in Nigeria and abroad.

The unit regularly goes on visitations to Seminaries assisting them to better teach future priests, build up and encourage seminarians to appreciate the call to go out into the world and proclaim the good news. The unit also is involved in coordinating the National Missionary Council. The council holds meetings annually with all segments of the church to discuss missionary mandate of the all in the Church.

The Unit for Ecumenism deals with relationship with non-Catholic Christians. The unit works principally with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), collaborating with the association in its multiple interventions in the political, religious and cultural issues affecting Christians in Nigeria. The increasing insurgencies violence and militancy in various segments and groups in Nigeria call for regular interventions from the Christian bodies like CAN. Thus, this unit of Ecumenism liaises with non-Catholics through various means at its disposal to assist in fostering peace among Christians in Nigeria.

The unit also works in collaboration with the Anglican and the Methodist Churches. Each year the unit organises discussions and conferences with the bishops of these churches and our Bishops to discuss areas of common concern. These Conferences are always based on a common acceptable theme. These annual or biennial conferences replicate the ones being organised by the Vatican Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The department through the Unit of Ecumenism is also into settling disputes between Christians. It works together with them to perform various common tasks such as with the Bible Society of Nigeria,



**Rev. Fr. Gregory Obanado, CBCN Committee Secretary
(Mission and Dialogue Unit)**

that is responsible for bible translation to indigenous languages and so on. Furthermore, the Unit is involved in other areas with the Christian Association of Nigeria, such as the present work to update the Constitution of the Christian Association of Nigeria. The unit presents suitable persons to represent the Catholic Church in discussions and work of the Christian Association of Nigeria. For instance, the new legal director of the Christian Association was just appointed, having been nominated by the Department of Mission and Dialogue.

The unit for Interreligious Dialogue deals with dialogue with non-Christians especially the Muslims. The Unit organises seminars and Film-shows to promote dialogue with leaders and representative of various Non-Governmental Organisations and religious bodies. For instance, the unit recently organised a film show towards the end of last year, to highlight the need for peace among young Christians and Muslim youths. The unit is constantly in collaboration with other organisations like UFUK Dialogue (a Turkish Muslim religious organisation involved in dialogue between Muslims and Christians), to organise various seminars and conferences, to promote regular contacts between Muslims and Christians. For instance, early this year there was an International Conference on 'Love Tolerance and Peace,' the fifth segment of the series which comes up every two years.

This year 2020, the Unit will lay more emphasis on assisting the youth, to explore possibilities to get more involved in peaceful collaboration with non-Christians. The unit would like the various Catholic youth organisations and groups to be knowledgeable and be more involved in the work of interreligious dialogue.

The unit is also involved in maintaining the need for Major Seminaries to be more interested in the work of promoting peace with other religions through active collaboration with non-Christian youth and students. The unit along with other units visit seminaries each year to encourage and assist the Seminaries in organising and maintaining a good academic curricula for interreligious dialogue, Ecumenism and missionary activity of the church. This year will see the visitation of the department to Seminaries in kaduna and Owerri.



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T: 01-3428992 E: salustrustgtdatacentre@gmail.com W: salustrustltd.org

OFFICES

Abuja Office

CSN Building
Plot 456 Cadastral,
Durumi 1, Abuja
08058012842,
08079661200

Ibadan Office

Catholic Youth Building
Opp. St. Mary's
Cathedral
Oke-padi,
Ibadan.

Enugu Office

No. 1-3, Cidjap Str.,
Off Zik's Avenue,
Beside Mtn Office,
Uwani,
Enugu State.

Asaba Office

Km 9, Asaba/Benin Exp-way,
Heritage Plaza,
Asaba, Delta State
08113898232,
09053810135

24-hour Contact Centre: 01 3428992, 08052272587

The Department of Mission and Dialogue above all, coordinates the work of Interreligious Dialogue and Christian unity in the diocese throughout Nigeria. The Unit collaborates with diocesan directors of Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism in all dioceses of Nigeria. These directors from the various diocese give annual reports to the department at a meeting organised yearly. These meetings are organised to discuss the religious and political and cultural situations in the country as they affect Catholics exploring ways of solving numerous problems. More importantly the directors make reports on their activities in their dioceses during the year. At this annual meetings we make efforts to as a group, to proffer solutions and set goals for future actions.

The last meeting was held in the Archdiocese of Calabar. The next meeting will be held in Abuja in November 2020.

These three units work together since the work of each of them cannot be completely separated from each other. These units are each supervised by a bishop appointed by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria who oversees and directs all activities through the director of the department of Mission and Dialogue.

The work of the department of Mission and Dialogue has become very urgent and necessary because of the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The ever-evolving experiences of missionaries, the problem between Christians on one hand and between Muslims and Christians on the other. We must not forget the ever growing and increasing violence of Muslim fundamentalism throughout the world. The Holy Father Pope Francis in his recent Encyclical Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium* has called on all Catholics to explore new paths and update the means at our disposal and find new ways and methods to undertake missionary activities in the world. This is the work being undertaken by the Department of Mission and Dialogue.

Mission & Dialogue dept. partners Ufuk Dialogue to organize Peace Conference

As part of its activities to promote interreligious dialogue among Christians and Muslims, especially the youths of the two religions, the Mission and Dialogue department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) recently organised series of activities in collaboration with Ufuk Dialogue, a Turkish Religious group whose activity in Nigeria and many parts of the world focuses on organising activities for peaceful discussions among followers of Abrahamic Religions; and organising programmes for youths of different religions.

The activities were organised to bring youth of different religions together and sensitise them on the need for interreligious dialogue. At the series of programme, lectures were organized and delivered by Interreligious scholars. One of the series was the Youth and Dialogue Peace Conference' Titled: "Building a New World and Embracing Peaceful Coexistence" held at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Conference Hall in Abuja, on 4 December 2019. The programme was forms one of the activities to sensitise the youth to undertake the all-important work of dialogue among themselves. With the insecurity and lawlessness in the country. The department finds it important to make the youth more conversant with the need for dialogue among the followers of different religions in our society. The lectures were delivered by men and women drawn from both religions.



L-R: Archbishop Valerian Okeke of Onitsha; Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Abuja, Bishop George Dodo and Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso (extreme right) during the CBCN Prayer Protest Procession in Abuja

FILM SHOW USED TO SENSITIZE YOUTHS ON IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE

As part of the recent activities undertaken by the Mission and Dialogue department, a film show was organized for a group of Moslem and Christian youths to sensitize them on the importance of dialogue for peaceful co-existence and solving matters of common interest. The film was titled the Sultan and the Saint. The film described the famous encounter between Sultan al Kamil and Saint Francis of Assisi in the Holy Land during the wars of crusades, about 800 hundred years ago. The movie was shown to the youths at the Nile University in Abuja. The Movie described the famous meeting that happened in the war field, opened the possibility for the end of the crusade. It showed that dialogue can bring any sad situation to an end. The movie was as engrossing as it was educating. All the youths present were very impressed not only with the lesson but with the fact that their minds were open to understand what they never taught possible.

At the end of the movie, an essay competition was organised for the youth to show their understanding and impression they had of the movie. At the end, a Catholic youth won the first prize of 100,000, while the second prize of 75,000 Naira was won by a Muslim girl and the third prize of 50,000 Naira, was claimed by a youth from one of the Pentecostal Churches in Abuja. The movie made a deep impression on the invited Muslim and Christian youths. Many positive comments were received. It was indeed a meeting point between the youth of the two religions. The feedback was that, many of them who have either not heard about the Crusades, or who have had a wrong impression about the wars began to look at the outcome of the meeting as a basis for further encounter between Christian and Muslim youth. It is hoped that the movie will serve as a springboard for the promotion of peace. We hope to continue this aspect of dialogue since the youth are the most vulnerable to religious violence and war.

Conference on Love and Tolerance organized for Youths

A conference on love and tolerance was organised recently by the department in collaboration with some non-governmental organisations. The theme of the conference was: Love and Tolerance: Countering Violent Extremism, held on February 20, this year. The principal lecture titled "The Race to Goodness" was delivered by Professor Scott, an eminent Islamic and Interreligious Dialogue expert from the United States. Other eminent men and women from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds were also invited to discuss the importance of love and peace in our society.

Religious leaders who were invited, spoke on the need for dialogue at this critical state of our nation. The need for training and teaching Interreligious dialogue in schools as early as possible for youth of different religions was underscored as one of the important solutions to the incessant problem of religious intolerance and discrimination in Nigeria. The series of lectures based on Love and Tolerance were conducted in Abuja, Kaduna and Lagos from 18 to 22, February.



Most Rev. Francis Femi Adesina

"IN MOMMENTS OF TRIBULATIONS, REMAIN STEADFAST IN YOUR FAITH"

In our moments of trials and tribulations, we must hold fast to our faith and give gratitude to God, believing that when we live, we live for God and when we die, we die for God; the Bishop of Ijebu-Ode Diocese, Most Rev. Francis Femi Adesina has admonished.

Bishop Adesina gave the admonition in his homily at the funeral Mass for late Fr. Matthew Arimoro, at St Benedict Cathedral, Osogbo, Osun State, on Thursday, 20 February, 2020. The late Fr. Arimoro died in motor accident, along with six other youths of the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo, on their way back from the holy Pilgrimage Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Otan Aiyagbaju. Osun State.

Condoling the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. John Oyejola, priests, religious, members of the family of the deceased and those of the other youths who also died in the accident, the Presbyterate and the entire lay faithful of Osogbo Diocese; Bishop Adesina urged them to take solace in God saying: "In every situation and circumstance of life, our FAITH and the WORD of God teaches us to give glory to God the Father, and we all say: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit"

Bishop Adesina noted that no matter the time we spend in this life, our destiny must be fulfilled; adding that several passages in the Scripture show that life is not how long but how well, He went down memory lane on the short life of the young priest who died at the age of 31, and was a priest for only 40 days; and said: whatever or however we go through life we must achieve our destiny, He described the vocation life of the deceased as one full many challenges but his perseverance and resilience made him to scale through to his destiny.

Assuring that the young priest and his "six angels" have obtained the crown of glory and in heaven with their Lord and Master Jesus Christ, Bishop Adesina described late father Arimoro as a prophetic mystery who has taught him the virtue in perseverance in vocation, in the midst of challenges and tribulations.

His words: "My son, Rev. Fr. Matthew Oluwatosin Arimoro, in life and in death you have taught me a lesson. You have taught me that I must never give up to distractions in my priestly vocation. You have taught me that no matter my failures, I must keep rising up and coming and coming back to the Lord until He makes me perfect. Fr. Matthew Arimoro, in life and in death, you have taught me the need for a personal conversion of heart." He described Fr Arimoro's 40 days of priesthood as symbolic, noting that his exemplary life of love, service for the common good, kindness and gentleness challenges us as to what we want to be remembered for when we depart this mortal world of iniquity.

FOURTH NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS IN PICTURES



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze addressing the delegates.



John Cardinal Onaiyekan making an intervention during one of the sessions.



Cross section of the delegates at the opening ceremony



L-R: Rev. Frs. Gregory Obanado and Joseph Nomwhange at the opening ceremony



PMS National Director, Rev. Fr. George Ajana and other delegates at one of the sessions.



Cross section of delegates at the opening ceremony



Some of the delegates during one of the lecture sessions.

The fourth National Missionary Congress of the Church in Nigeria, held in Benin City, Edo State was indeed a memorable successes considering the attendance and outcome of the deliberations at the congress. Also of note was the presence of the President of the Pontifical Mission Societies at the Vatican, Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, who presided at the closing Mass at the Vivian Ogu Memorial Animation Centre, Benin City. He was accompanied to the celebration by the Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi. Also in attendance were about 35 Bishops from the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces in the country and over 300 delegates comprising of Rev. Frs. People of Consecrated Life and lay faithful. The congress which also featured a mission exhibition, prayers, paper presentations and group discussions, took place at the Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre from October 22 – 27, 2019. While the opening Mass presided over by the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and the Archbishop of the Ecclesiastical Province of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze, took place at the S Paul's Cathedral Church. The theme for the Congress was:

Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ in Nigeria on Mission. In his homily at the opening Mass, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze stressed the need for all Catholics to be versed in the teachings of the Church in order to carry out efficiently and effectively their missionary mandate with the Good News of Christ.

In the homily titled: Go into the World and Preach the Gospel to the Whole Creation (Mark 16:15); Archbishop Akubeze noted that preaching the Gospel is not optional for all the faithful, irrespective of their vocation but rather "very compulsory for every Christian". He however added: "But in order to carry out this directive or instruction, we have to know what we are going out to preach. The content of the Gospel must be well understood by the preacher. The Gospel must have permeated the life of the preacher before going out to preach. You cannot tell the people about the Good News if you are not familiar with the Good news"; which according to him; are contained in the doctrine of the Church, the Creed, the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Traditions of the Church. Noting that the Church is always on mission and every faithful a missionary by virtue of Baptism, the CBCN President however declared: "The proclamation of the Gospel entails a call to conversion of hearts. We the agents of the mission must first be truly converted so that we do not constitute obstacles to the message we are going to be preaching.

Speakers at the Congress included: Most Rev. Emmanuel AdetoyeseBadejo, the Bishop of Oyo Diocese; whose paper centred on the role of media on evangelization: opportunities and challenges; Rev. Fr. Onyeka Amaegwu of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, Enugu State; whose paper was on: the Church is missionary by her very nature and Rev. Fr. Dr. Humphrey Anameje; whose presentation was on: the role of

BENIN ARCHDIOCESE HOSTS FOURTH NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS



Group photograph of the Bishops with Archbishop Giampietro Dal Taso from the Vatican (4th from left) in front of the Vivian Ogu Movement.

- ***CBCN President on the Importance of the Congress***
- **Congress to make the Church more Vibrant**
- ***Vatican Dicastery President presides at closing Mass***

the laity in the missionary enterprise in Nigeria.

Other speakers were: Rev. Fr. Dr. Andrew Ovienloba who spoke on: the contemporary challenges of mission in Nigeria today; Professor Edward Erhagbe whose presentation was on: the youth as instruments of evangelization in Nigeria; Rev. Fr. Gregory Obanado, CBCN Dialogue Committee Secretary; who addressed the issue of: the effects of the ecumenical movement and religious diversity on the exercise of the missionary mandate of the Church in Nigeria; while Monsignor Emmanuel Nwosu and Rev. Fr. Stephen Dumbiri, Director Vivian Ogu Movement; spoke respectively on: the missionary significance of the heroic virtues of Blessed Michael IweneTansi to the Church in Nigeria; and the missionary significance of the heroic virtues of Vivian Ogu to the Church in Nigeria.

In his intervention during one of the sessions, the Archbishop emeritus of Abuja; John Cardinal Onaiyekan emphasized the invaluable role of inculturation in the life of the Church, describing it as a veritable tool for her evangelization apostolate in the country. He however cautioned that the process should be gradual, as there was need for more in-depth knowledge about the African Religion and culture by Church Theologians and the lay faithful. He stated that Church doctrine is the same from Rome to Nigeria and "there is the need for us to invest in what the Church teaches".

The cardinal continued: "We should not belittle the knowledge of our illiterate villagers. Inculturation has been with the Church for long; Conflict between faith and culture has existed for long; there is therefore the need for caution and we should not be too much in a hurry in "inculturating" the Church in the country.

Speaking on the topic Contemporary Challenges of Mission in Nigeria, the speaker, Rev. Andrew Ovienloba noted that knowledge is the best way to be a true Catholic and stressed

FOURTH NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS IN PICTURES



CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi (2nd from left); the Auxillary Bishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Anselm Umoren and other delegates at one of the lecture sessions



Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo Diocese making his presentation at the programme .



PMS Episcopal Bishop Chairman, Most Rev. Bulu Dauwa Yohanna addressing the delegates.



The Reporters' Desk from left is Sir Joseph Falase, Secretary, CBCN Laity Committee (CSN)



Professor Edward Erhagbe of the University of Benin delivering his paper



Archbishop Giampietro Daltoso, President of the Pontifical Missions at the Vatican (3rd from left) addressing the delegates.



Some of the delegates during one of the lecture session



John Cardinal Onaiyekan at one of the exhibition stands

the need for change as Catholics, especially the lay faithful should be well-grounded in the faith. In his presentation premised on: The Role of the Media in Evangelization: Opportunities and Challenges, The Bishop of Oyo Diocese, Most Rev. Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo stressed the importance of communication in the evangelization apostolate of the Church, outlining the role expected of each faithful in the perspective. He however reiterated the need to entrust the evangelization mission of the Church in the hands of media professionals and practitioners with the attendant responsibilities, noting that the Vatican has blazed the trail in this perspective. In the communique issued at the end of the congress, the delegates among other things, noted that mission congress has the potential of making the Church more vibrant and

emphasized the importance of the collaboration of all faithful groups to facilitate the realization of the mission mandate of the Church. Other decisions included: the call for a more vibrant laity for the Church's evangelization mission, as well as the re-articulation of the identity of the Church in Nigeria to enhance her missionary mandate. The communique was signed by Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah, CBCN Episcopal Chairman for Mission and Dialogue and Chairman, National Missionary Council of Nigeria (NMCN); organizers of the Congress; Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomwhange; CSN Director of Mission and Dialogue and Rev. Fr. George Ajana, National Director of Pontifical Mission Societies of Nigeria and National Secretary of NMCN.

PAPAL HONOUR FOR SIR MARK ASU-Obi AND 11 OTHERS



Sir Mark Asu-Obi Receiving the Pope's certificate and medal from the Prelate, Bishop John N. Niyiring, Catholic Bishop of Kano Diocese



Bishop John N. Niyiring OSA (centre) flanked by Sir and Lady Mark Asu-Obi

Sir Mark Asu-Obi, the Good Governance Programme Officer of the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN), Abuja; was one of the twelve faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Kano honoured with Papal Awards for the recognition of their invaluable services to the Church and the common good of humanity. The investiture and installation ceremony took place during the celebration of the Mass on December 8, 2019; the feast day of the Immaculate Conception. The ceremony was presided over by the Catholic Bishop of Kano Diocese, Most Rev. John Niyiring OSA.

Sir Asu-Obi and seven others were honoured with the Papal Order of the Knight of St. Gregory the Great (KSGG); one of the recipient became a Knight of St Sylvester; another a Dame while another became a Papal Medalist. The ceremony was attended by members of the family of the Knights, friends and well-wishers from different parts of the country. Sir Asu-Obi and the other recipients were recognized by the Holy Father for their personal services to the Holy See through their unusual labours and support and excellent examples in their communities and country.

Sir Mark Asu-Obi, is a passionate development worker and humanitarian who has spent over two decades serving humanity and intervening in disaster-ridden communities at management roles across various states in Northern Nigeria. In recognition of his selfless work and services, he has received over 25 awards including the Award of Excellence for Peace-building and Advocacy, in recognition of great contributions towards the development of Northern Nigeria and Nigeria at large in 2016.



Sir Mark Asu-Obi flanked by Sir. Steve Adehi, KSM, KSGG (left) and Sir George Zangir KSJ, KSGG

FOURTH NATIONAL MISSION CONGRESS IN PICTURES



Rev. Fr. Humphrey Anameje making his presentation at the programme



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze at one of the exhibition stands



Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso from the Vatican (Centre) presiding at the closing Mass



Members of the family of late Vivian Ogu at the closing Mass



One of the study groups in session



Cross section of Rev. Sisters at the closing Mass



Cross section of Rev. Frs. at the closing Mass



Governor Godwin Obaseki of Edo State in a warm handshake with Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama



FIRST AFRICAN REGIONAL CONGRESS OF FIAMC



The Federation of International Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC, www.fiamc.org), with Headquarters at the Vatican City unites all Catholic medical and dental practitioners across the world.

The Nigerian affiliate-organization known as the Association of Catholic Medical Practitioners of Nigeria is hosting the first-ever African Regional Congress of FIAMC.

Theme:

**Achieving Universal Health Coverage in Africa by 2030:
Leveraging Strategic Opportunities of Faith-Based Organizations in Health Systems
Strengthening.**

Subthemes:

1. Improving Service Delivery Towards UHC: How Ready are Catholic Medical Practitioners in the Face of Emerging Global Health Challenges?
2. Innovative Financing for Health: Is there a Role for Faith-Based Institutions?
3. The Role of Catholic Medical Associations in Bolstering Information Technology and Use of Evidence in Health Care
4. Natural Reproductive Techniques: Culture and Faith in Family Health Care; and
5. African Regional Congress of FIAMC as Vehicle for Continental Health Actions.

Venue: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Resource Centre, Durumi 1, Garki – Abuja.

Dates: July 2-4, 2020

Time: 9.00AM – 5.00PM

Community Health Outreach to Durumi settlements 1, 2 & 3 – Thursday, July 2, 2020

Speakers:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| • Chairman | - Prof. Onyebuchi Chukwu (Former Health Minister, Nigeria) |
| • Special Guest of Honour | - Dr. Osagie Ehanire (Minister of Health, Fed Republic of Nigeria) |
| • Guest Speaker | - Prof. Hyacinth Icheoku (Vice Chancellor, Veritas University of Nigeria, Abuja) |
| • Speaker | - Dr. Wahome Ngare (Kenya) |
| • Chief Host: | - Most Rev Dr. Ignatius Kaigama (Archbishop of Abuja) |
| • Host: | - Most Rev. Dr. Anselm Umoren (auxiliary Bishop of Abuja) |

Registrations

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Early Bird Registration (before May 30, 2020): | - N20,000 |
| 2. Late Registration: | - N25,000 |
| 3. Foreign Participant's Registration: | - \$100 |
| 4. Accommodation is at CSN Resource Centre | - N10,000 per night (first come, first served) |

Registration covers welcome cocktail, conference materials, tea breaks, group lunch, guided city tour, 10 CPD points and a gala night.

Make payments into the following account:

Fidelity Bank Plc
Number: 4110020632
Name: Association of Catholic Medical Practitioners of Nigeria

For further information & enquiries, contact:

• Emmanuel: 08034745345
• Matthew: 08033043920
• Teresa: 08056011582
Email: cmanews.ng@gmail.com; eibokey@yahoo.com
Website: www.catholicdoctorsng.com





CARITAS NIGERIA

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News Magazine



Caritas
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CARITAS NIGERIA clocks 10

- **A decade Journey of Success Story**
- **A brighter future of service for the Common Good**
- **Celebration in September this year**
- **Not all Bed of Roses**

In September 2010, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) established Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (also known as Caritas Nigeria) as the specialized national humanitarian and development agency with a mandate to coordinate humanitarian relief services and development programs on behalf of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Caritas Nigeria partners with civil society organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, international and local non-governmental organizations, as well as government agencies, to give succor to the needy, without consideration of their tribe, creed or gender. Through its core thematic areas of focus namely: Agriculture & Livelihoods, Anti-Human Trafficking & Forced Migration, Emergency Response & Humanitarian Services, Good Governance, Health & HIV/AIDS, and Institutional Capacity Strengthening, Caritas Nigeria has continued to create and sustain a harmonious society where everyone enjoys fullness of life, through scads of projects and programs. Since inception, Caritas Nigeria has reached over 10 million beneficiaries through her thematic areas.

For this humanitarian agency of the CBCN, the occasion of her 10th anniversary, which comes up in September 2020, is an opportunity to recount the journey so far, and to appreciate her partners – local and international alike – with whose support she has consistently put radiating smiles on the faces of the needy and vulnerable within and without Nigeria.

2nd Africa Regional Conference of the Santa Marta Group

Human Trafficking is one of the most dramatic manifestations of the commodification of the human person. It not only disfigures the humanity of the victim but also dehumanizes those who perform it. It seriously damages humanity as a whole." Those were the remarks of Pope Francis at an International Conference on Human Trafficking held in Rome from 9 to 11 April 2019 and was quoted by Archbishop Philip Anyolo while declaring open the second edition of the Africa Regional Conference of the Santa Marta Group on Human Trafficking in Nairobi, Kenya from October 2 – 3, 2019.

The theme of the conference was 'Sensitizing the Communities on Human Trafficking in Africa'. The event examined critically the contributions of the Church, Civil Society Organizations and Law Enforcement in achieving social transformation of the communities in Africa. In line

with this, key highlights of deliberations were the context of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 in Human Trafficking, Trends of Human Trafficking in East Africa, Initiatives by the Government of Kenya to Combat Human Trafficking, Protection of Human Trafficking victims in Eastern Africa and how churches in Kenya can be counter trafficking agents at the community level.

Participants were drawn from key stakeholders among them, Catholic Bishops, Civil Society Organizations, partners, representatives of the national Government of Kenya and Law enforcement agencies. Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, England, Ghana, Angola and Swasiland were among countries that were represented in the conference. Nigerian delegation to the event included: Fr Stephen Dumbiri, Fr Fidelis Arhedo and Sr Monica Roland all of Benin Province as well as Dr Justin Ekpa, of Caritas Nigeria.



Group photograph of participants at the conference.



Archbishop Philip Anyolo, President Kenya Catholic Bishops Conference, giving the opening remarks.



Fr Mark Odion (MSP), Africa Project coordinator of the Santa Marta Group making a presentation



The opening ceremony prayer time



Participants at the Conference

CCFN IN THE SERVICE OF THE COMMON GOOD

The last few months, the CCFN has been engaged in many humanitarian services and activities in different parts of the country. Some of the activities carried out in different parts of the country from September to date include: Fullness of Life for Augmented Strategy for High Impact Project (FLAGSHIP) (on the 4GATES program) training for facility recruits in Delta state; Consultative Forum with select dioceses across 9 provinces on situational analysis of the challenges in the country and the Church's response so far held in Abuja; Nigeria Implementation Science Alliance (NISA) Conference in Abuja; Provincial Meeting of JDPC Directors in Kaduna; Opening of a Shelter home for Migrants donated by the Archbishop of Benin City and Official launch of Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) Surge response by the Enugu State Government. Others include 3rd World Day of the Poor; Official launch of Undetectable equals Untransmittable (U=U) strategy by the United States Government in Abuja; International Day to End Violence against Women across the state offices; World AIDS Day celebration for Adolescents and Young People Living with HIV (AYPLHIV)... organized by the First Lady at the State House; World AIDS Day celebration across our state offices/3rd World Day of the Poor celebration at the national office; ICASA 2019 Conference in Rwanda and Official launch of Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) Surge response by the Imo State Government;

There were also project activities in Adamawa and Borno States. These included the distribution of agricultural inputs to selected farmers; disbursement of cash to household heads; skill acquisition training for vulnerable persons, and livestock distribution etc; The interventions funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through Caritas Germany) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through Caritas Norway). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), were accompanied out on different dates in response to the displacement situation in the north east region. In addition, the UNHCR project in Ogoja reached out to Cameroonian refugees in the region.



Distribution of agricultural inputs to farmers in North East Nigeria. Funded by the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs through Caritas Norway, and implemented



Official launch of the Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) Surge response in Enugu State.



The Executive Secretary of CCFN, Rev. Fr. Uchechukwu Obodoechina with the Executive Governor of Enugu State at the ART Surge launch.



Livestock distribution by CCFN. The activity was sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)



The Archbishop of Benin City, Most. Rev. Augustine Akubeze, opens a shelter home in Benin City. The home donated by His Excellency to Caritas Nigeria addresses the shelter need for returning migrants in Benin City.



Staff of CCFN, Imo State Government, US Government's representatives at the ART Surge launch In Imo State.



CCFN workers distributing agricultural inputs to displaced persons in North East Nigeria; Sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees .

Daughters of Divine Love Congregation celebrate Golden Jubilee

• Bishop roles out 5 Golden Rules

Final celebrations marking the golden jubilee anniversary of the founding of the Daughters of the Divine Congregation came to a climax with the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass and other activities at the Eleme Convent of the congregation, in Enugu State. The Mass was presided over by Most Rev. Denis Isizoh, the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha and CBCN Episcopal Chairman for Social Communications. The celebration was attended by dignitaries from all walks of life and members of the congregation from different parts of the country.

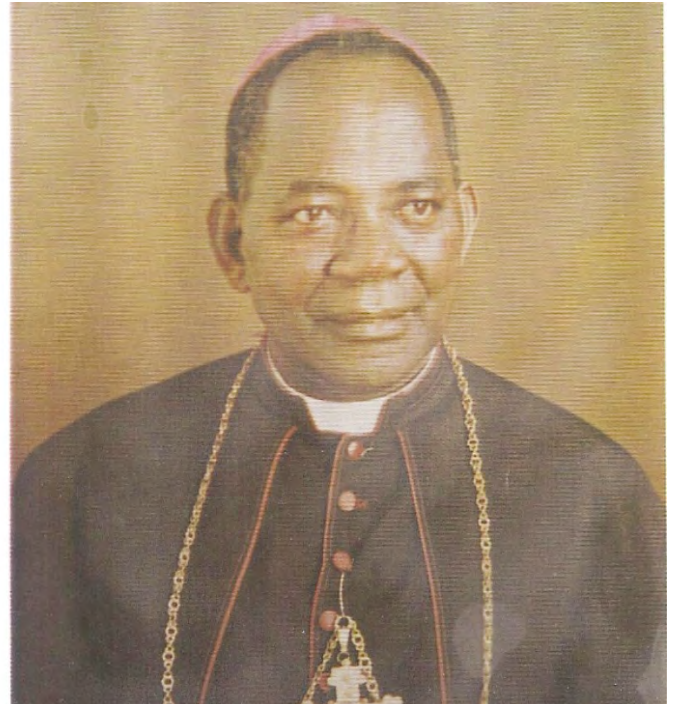
In his homily, Bishop Isizoh on the focus of the founder of the congregation, late Bishop Godfrey Mary-Paul Okoye, admonished the Sisters of the Congregation to look ahead for another Golden Jubilee celebration with focus on how to address the challenges of discernment of vocations as well as that of unity and cohesion. These were part of the five golden rules, the homilist urged them to reflect on as they begin the second part of the centenary of the existence of their congregation.

The other areas of concern which the bishop urged the sisters to reflect on were: The challenge of old age and sickness of members; the challenge of dealing with age gap between members; and as you go to distant lands, the challenge of managing influence of many cultures and members Bishop Isizoh while congratulating members of the congregation for weathering the storm of the past five decades also used the occasion to remind them that their vocation is not one of ease and luxury as "our Lord Jesus Christ assures us of reward of hard work but does not promise a life of comfort".

Going down memory lane on the journey of the congregation since inception, Bishop Isizoh noted that it has not been all bed of roses for the founder and the pioneer members of the congregation. He described the founder, late Bishop Godfrey Mary-Paul Okoye as "A man full of ideas with great love for evangelization; compassionate with very large heart;" with an inspiration to found an institute that would help to spread God's love.

He passionately spoke on the perseverance, dedication and devotion of the pioneer members of the congregation, the challenges of the early years of the congregation; the death of the founder which rattled the congregation to the very foundation; generosity of friends to keep the hope and dream of the founder alive, the invaluable contributions of the congregation to the evangelization apostolate of the Church within and outside the country; what the future holds and the positive impact of the love of Christ on the congregation.

Speaking on the challenges faced by the pioneer members of the congregation, Bishop Isizoh declared: "The Daughters decided to stick together and weather the storm. They remembered that biblical passage which their founder wrote on the sanctuary wall of his chapel in Port Harcourt and which he eventually gave as the motto of the Institute: "Caritas Christi urget nos". It is the love Christ that must push them forward to face the challenges of living out the spiritual legacy which their founder wanted to pass on to them."



Late Bishop Godfrey Paul Okoye, Founder of the congregation

FR. CALLISTUS ISARA: MSPs NEW SUPERIOR GENERAL

The fifth General Chapter of the Missionary Society of St Paul of Nigeria, held at the National Missionary Society of St. Paul, Gwagwalada, Abuja, elected Fr. Callistus Isara its sixth Superior General. Fr. Isara succeeds Fr. Victor Onwukeme who was elected in 2013.

Born October 14, 1966 in Ovu Inland, Etiope East LGA, Delta State, Fr. Callistus Isara was ordained an MSP priest on June, 22, 1991. After his one year pastoral experience in the Archdiocese of Calabar, Monsignor Godwin Akpan, the Superior General at the time sent him to the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, to do graduate studies in Pastoral Theology from where he graduated with a Doctor of Ministry degree in 1996. He also obtained a Certificate in Advanced Clinical Pastoral Education from Eger Health Care Centre, Staten Island, New York, USA. He joined the formation team of the National Missionary Seminary of St. Paul, Gwagwalada, Abuja on October 1, 1996 where he served till 2004.

After a Sabbatical year he was appointed Director of the Gaudium et Spes Institute –the Abuja Archdiocesan Centre for prayer and renewal for Priests, Religious and Laity. While he served at Gaudium et Spes he continued to lecture on a part time basis at the Seminary. In April, 2012, His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan appointed him Episcopal Vicar for Religious of the Archdiocese.

Fr. Callistus Isara assumes this leadership task with a lot of experience in administration, the academia, pastoral counselling, spiritual direction, human formation, ongoing formation for Laity, Priests and Religious and human relations in general which he will bring to bear in his new task. As MSP Superior General he leads 281 members of a dynamic missionary family serving in Nigeria, Botswana, South Sudan, South Africa, Chad, Malawi, Cameroon, Liberia, Gambia, Kenya, the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, Italy, Grenada and the Bahamas. His team consisting of Fr. Tony Anike, Fr. Jude Alih, Fr. Robert Kajoh and Fr. Solomon Bulus.



SISTERS HOME VISITORS CELEBRATE 70TH ANNIVERSARY WITH BENEFACTORS, OTHERS

For the Congregation of Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary, November last year was a month of double celebration as they shared their joy with their benefactors and benefactresses, associates and supporters among other guests, on the occasion of the founding of their congregation. On November 23, to be precise, the Sisters celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of their congregation and 18th year of their establishment in Nigeria. During the annual anniversary celebration, tagged: Evening with the HVM Sisters; the Sisters host and entertain their benefactors, benefactresses, associates, supporters and other guests; and showcase who they are and what they do.

The major highlight of last year's celebration was an award ceremony at some people who have specially supported the Congregation since they arrived in Nigeria. Among those honoured were: John Cardinal O. Onaiyekan, Rt. Rev. Msgr. Kenneth Enang, Rev. Fr. Raphael Madu, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, Rev. Fr. Peter Okonkwo, CMF, Rev. Fr. Cosmos Nwosuh, MSP, Rev. Fr. Raymond Aina, MSP, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel-Mary Mbam, MSP, Rev. Sr. Josephine Nwaogwugwu, HFSN, Rev. Fr. Lawrence Tajah, Rev. Fr. Raphael Asika, MSP, Dr. (Engr). Emmanuel Mbaka, Mr. Steve Oronsaye, Sir Peter Eluyefa, Mr. Raphael Simire, Amb. Nkem Wadibia-Anyanwu, Mrs. Josephine Opara, Mrs. Jummai Kwanashie, Mrs. Arese Arase, Mrs. Grace Alfa, Dr. Edet Umana and Sir. Peter Okolo. They were presented with beautiful plaques in appreciation of their invaluable support to the congregation.

Some of the associates who have been specially committed to the mission of the HVMs were also honoured. The associates honoured were: Mr. Alfred Abah, Mrs. Mary Aina, Mr. Alex Aghalor, Miss Dorothy Duruaku, Miss Dorothy Akpan, Miss Anthonia Onwudiachi, Miss. Florence Chilakpu, Mr. Frank Onwudinjo, Mrs. Shola Idoko and Mr. Matthew Okuta. Associates are lay people who collaborate with the HVMs and share in their mission. Every baptized Catholic can be an Associate of Sisters, HVM. You are invited to join in their mission.

Sr. Clare Emeruom, the Vicar General and the leader for Nigerian Region, on behalf of the sisters used the opportunity to express the gratitude of the congregation to the people honoured for their invaluable support for the activities of the

Sisters in the country

The sisters entertained their guests with cultural dance, choreography/ballet, documentary, songs, poems/recitals, music etc. They exhibited their numerous products like, published books, music albums, rosaries, handmade greeting cards, plantain flour, Adire materials in shirts and aprons, confectionaries, etc, to showcase their talents, gifts and handiwork.

Speaking to CSN News magazine, the Vicar General and leader for the Nigerian Region expressed optimism that HVM will continue to grow and continue to treasure the Word of God in all things, as it is the root and source behind everything we do. Her words: "God's Word impels us to spread the Good News through our worship, our lives, our programmes of faith formation and our service to those in need."

Sr. Clare outlining the chasm of the congregation and their mission statement, gave a brief history of the congregation. She said: "Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary (HVM) was founded on November 21, 1949 in Detroit, Michigan, USA by Sr. Mary Schutz. Since then, HVM, a multicultural community has ministered in the city of Detroit with focus on welcoming newly arriving African-American families in Detroit. HVM Sisters walked up and down the streets of Detroit knocking on doors to bring people to the Church."

The Vicar General continued: "Currently in Nigeria and in USA, we reach out to people in the context of their lives where they dwell and encourage them through respectful conversation and common action to explore goodness, truth and beauty in themselves and in their community. We strive to realize our mission through the broad thrust of evangelization and pastoral ministry in various forms and expressions: to continue the mission of Jesus; to evangelize; to foster community; to enculturate the faith; to work for justice and peace and to evoke a prophetic critique of our culture and life."

She concluded: "These we put into consideration while carrying out our numerous apostolates which include areas of education, catechetics, pastoral and social work, lay leadership and youth formation, administration, children ministry, health, empowerment programmes and most primarily, home visitation, etc."

13 ASEC/HESA STUDENTS GRADUATE AT VERITAS UNIVERSITY

The efforts of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC), as facilitating the training of religious for more effective and efficient evangelization got a boost recently, when 13 student Religious sponsored by the institution graduated at the Veritas University, Kubwa, Abuja. The African Sisters Education Collaborative works in collaboration with the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious (NCWR), with the ultimate goal of facilitating access to education for women religious in Africa; to enhance the expansion of the education, health, economic and spiritual services they provide.



The Sisters who benefitted from ASEC sponsorship and graduated at Veritas at the last convocation of the institution, held, this month, included: Sr. Monica Uche Anyi DHS, BA in Guidance and Counseling/Education Foundation; Sr. Blessing Ngozi Ezema SSH, BA in Education Management/Education Foundation; Sr. Felicia Syluanus Ibanga, PHJC, BA in Education Biology/Science Education; Sr. Lilian Deberechi Eboh SHJC, Education Foundation; Sr. Margaret Okaima Ogbemor SSMA, Arts & Social Sciences; Sr. MaryBen Omoso Onimhawo SSH, Education Foundation and Sr. Suzana Gertrude Livinus Didam

SSL, Science Education.

Others are: Sr. Theresa Uzoamaka Ezewulukwa OLA, Education Foundation; Sr. Justina Ndidiamaka Nwankwo SSH, Education Foundation; Sr. Juliana Nneamaka Onwuasoigwe SJGS, BA in Education Management/Education Foundation; Sr. Margaret Oghenero Okudaje OLA, History and International Relation/Humanities; Sr. Gloria Nodebechi Onah MSHR, Education Foundation; and Sr. Mediline Nkechinyere Oguadini SJR, Arts & Social Sciences.

As result of the impressive performance of the student Sisters, they were given presents by ASEC as a motivation for winning more Laurels in the field of education. All the graduated Sisters are members of different Religious /congregations that belong to the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious.



L-R: Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo, SST (ASEC Country Director - Cameroon), Sr. Clare Adelakun, DHS (ASEC Program Coordinator - Nigeria), Sr. Francisca Damoah, SIJ (ASEC Country Director, Ghana & Regional Director, West Africa), Sr. Clementina Obembe, OSF (Ex-Regional Director, West Africa), Sr. Mary Cecilia Draru, LSMIG, Ph.D. (ASEC Executive Director USA), Mother Mary Claude Oguh, IHM (NCWR President), Sr. Augustina Okoroafor, SSH (NCWR Executive Secretary), Sr. Veronica Fatoyinbo, SNDdeN (ASEC Country Director - Nigeria)

African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) is a Non-Governmental Organization whose mission is to facilitate access to education for women religious in Africa that leads to enhancement and expansion of the education, health, economic, social, environmental and spiritual services they provide. Their vision is to be a sustainable organization with a proven capacity to collaborate, develop and deliver educational programs that strengthen the capacity of women religious in Africa. The goal is to increase African sisters' access to education and professional training. Recognizing the need for new and creative ways to provide African sisters with education in the context of their own countries and cultures, ASEC began by developing a technological base to open various opportunities for working collaboratively with women religious in Africa toward this goal.

People of Consecrated Life urged to remain steadfast in their Vocation

People of Consecrated life have been admonished to remain steadfast in their vocation, in spite of the challenges of the present day world that the mission of Christ entrusted to them will propel them "to continue to be witnesses of the Gospel values to a world always in need of God".

The admonishment was contained in the communique issued at the end of the 2020 joint conference of Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Nigeria; held at the Catholic Pastoral Centre, Iwuruta, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in January, this year. The theme of the conference was: "Safeguarding and Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults/Nigerian Youth in the Face of the Present Situation: Migration, Drugs and Fundamentalism"

The Communique signed respectively by Very Rev. Fr. Simeon Nwobi, CMF, President, CMSN (Men); Mother Mary Claude Oguh, IHM, President, National Council of Women Religious (NCWR); Rev. Fr. Kingsley Ogbu, SMMM, Ag. Executive Secretary CMSN (Men) and Sr. Augsutina Okoroafor SSH,

Executive Secretary, NCWR; noted with great concern the sufferings of those who are victims of sexual abuse, abuse of power and abuse of conscience, especially the minors and vulnerable adults.

The statement added: "We painfully note that some of these abuses were perpetrated by some clerics, consecrated persons and those entrusted with the responsibility of watching over and caring for the vulnerable. While we condemn these atrocities and reaffirm our commitment to do everything possible to rid the Church and Society of all forms of abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, we pray for healing for all those who are suffering as a result of these abuses."

While acknowledging that the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults is wrong anywhere and anytime, the conference members note that the fundamental rights of this group must be protected and proffered the following solutions to ameliorate the situation.

VOCATIONS CORNER

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are international congregation founded in Amiens, France.

In 1804, St. Julie Billiart and Françoise Blin de Bourdon founded the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and dedicated her young Sisters to the instruction of children, especially "the poor in the most abandoned places."

In 1963, three Sisters came to Nigeria from the Great Britain and settled in Oro, Kwara State, teaching women and girls. Today, we serve in ten dioceses and live in many communities where the mission of education has expanded to ministries beyond the conventional classroom including Catechetics, Health care, Social work, Pastoral ministry, Communications, Retreats & Spiritual direction, and Peace & Justice programmes.

Internationally, we serve on five Continents, with ministries in fifteen countries.

Do you feel that God is calling to serve his people in the Religious Life? If you feel called to be a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, you will need the following qualifications:

Simplicity, Generosity, Good health, Apostolic Zeal, Spirit of sacrifice

5 credits with English & Mathematics

CONTACT US

VOCATION PROMOTER

sndnigeriavocations@gmail.com

081-3026-8964, 081-2412-9700, 070-5503-3712

WEB: www.sndden.org

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Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur...

... Making Known God's Goodness!



Sisters Sarah Bako, Virginia Nandi and Veronica Pascha on their first profession day at St. Patrick Catholic Church, Kudende, Ilorin

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

Matthew 7:24

CONGREGATIONS CELEBRATE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF BISHOP ANTHONY GOGO NWEDO, CSSp

Story by Rev. Fr. Kingsley Nonso Ogbu, MMM

Memories are one category of intangible property that are near-inseparable from human consciousness. Little wonder people make strenuous effort to keep memories of dear ones alive especially those who have touched and impacted their lives in a very special way. As a result of this, the Congregation of Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy (SMMM) and Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy (DMMM) in keeping precious memories evergreen, celebrated the 20th Anniversary



The Superior General of SMMM Congregation, Very Rev. Fr. Dr. George M. Okorie, SMMM. (centre) presiding at the celebration of the Mass.



Group photograph of some members of the two Congregations, after the celebration of the Mass.

of the death of their Father Founder, Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Gogo Nwedo, CSSp the Pioneer Bishop of Umuahia, Abia State. The celebration took place at the New DMMM COMMUNITY, within the territory of St. Jude's Catholic Parish Egwe in Oguta LGA Imo State. The celebration began with the Mass at the New Table Water Factory built by the DMMM Congregation which was equally blessed and officially opened as part of the celebration. It was presided by the Superior General of SMMM Congregation, Very Rev. Fr. Dr. George M. Okorie, SMMM.

In his homily, Fr. George praised God for the life well lived of our Father Founder. He welcomed the DMMM and SMMM members and the members of Bishop Nwedo's biological family, the Nzeribe Family to the annual celebration. He recounted the history of Bishop Nwedo by which he dedicated his life in a detached way. He gave a brief history of the life of the Founder Father.

When he was sent abroad for further studies, Gogo Nwedo joined the Spiritans Congregation in Ireland where he sought to configure himself more intimately with God in taking on the 3 Evangelical Counsels of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity.

After his profession, Fr Gogo Nwedo undertook further studies and after his Master's Degree, he returned to Nigeria, with a burning zeal for his pastoral ministry. Fr. Nwedo was sent to so many places to work as a priest and eventually when he was made Bishop of Umuahia Diocese, he took a more practical expression of his Apostolic Spirit in his motto: "Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit me" (He has sent me to Evangelize the poor).

Fr George therefore in keeping with the Gospel periscope of the day (Mtt 25), urged everyone present to imitate the Founder Father compassion, to work well as our vocation deserves especially in the area of mercy; in attending to the poor, the dejected and orphans. He equally urged the two Congregations to continue their efforts in the bid to keep up the Founder's Spirit in the Church.

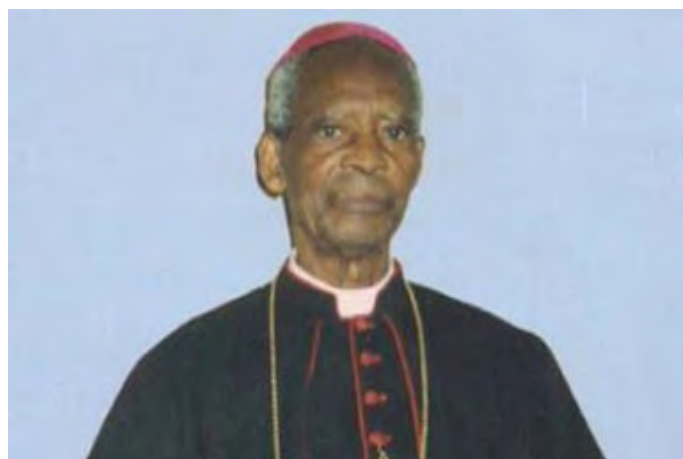
The SMMM Superior General closed his homily with the words of our Father Founder which he read out from a letter our Founder wrote to him on 12th Nov 1999 when Fr George was studying in Germany. In that letter, Bishop Nwedo instructed: "keep straight in your dealings with people, so that God will defend you when there is misunderstanding. Always remember that you are a religious and a missionary".

At the end of the Mass, the DMMM TABLE WATER FACTORY was blessed and unveiled by the Metropolitan of the Province, His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Anthony J. V. Obinna, ably represented by the Parish Priest and Dean of St. Jude's Catholic Church, Egwe, Very Rev. Fr. Christopher Orji.

In her vote of thanks, the Regional Superior of DMMM, Owerri Province, Sr. Nkem Iheme, DMMM praised God for

His mercies upon the Congregations and thanked everyone for coming to celebrate with the Sons and Daughters. Mother Angeline warmly welcomed everyone personally and promised the Egwe Community a quick manifestation of the living fruits of the water factory in their land.

The celebration of the Mass was followed by other activities including the entertainment of guests by a children cultural group.



Late Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Gogo Nwedo, CSSp, Founder of the Congregations

Killing with impunity in the name of Religion ...and Imagined ethnic cleansing

On January 8, this year, armed men suspected to be Boko Haram terrorists entered the Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna and abducted four students of the institution. The abducted students were: Michael Ikechukwu Nnadi, 18; Pius Kanwai, 19; Peter Umenukor, 23 and Stephen Amos, 23. One of the Seminarians was released on January 18; while two others were released on February 1. But Michael, an orphan who has been under the care of her grandmother since early age was sent to an untimely by his abductors and his lifeless body found on February 1st. This was after the spineless abductors had collected ransom for the release of the four students.

On January 25, the wife of Dr. Philip Ataga, a Kaduna based medical doctor; and her two children were kidnapped in their house. Her lifeless body was dumped along the Abuja Kaduna highway by her kidnappers while her two children were released, after collecting ransom. Earlier, Rev. Lawan Andimi, the Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for Adamawa State, was abducted when the terrorists invaded Michika, in Michika Local Government Area of the state, where he worked as a Pastor. On January 20, he was gruesomely murdered by the terrorists because their 50 Million Naira ransom demand could not be met. On Christmas eve, 2019, a faction of the terrorist group killed 11 Christian captives in Borno. In like manner, this same month, four abducted aid workers of the Action Against Hunger International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO); were murdered in cold blood by the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), because, according to them negotiations between them and the Federal Government broke down. On Boxing Day 2019, It was reported that a bride-to-be and her potential bridal team were shot dead by suspected Boko Haram insurgents at Gwoza in Borno State on their way to Yola in Adamawa State to prepare for the wedding. On Sunday, February 9, this year, about 30 stranded passengers were reported killed at Auno Village near Maiduguri, the Borno State capital. The terrorists who attacked the village around 9.30pm also set ablaze vehicles and other valuable properties and allegedly abducted other passengers with three buses. The incident was confirmed by the Theatre Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole, Major General Olusegun Adeniyi while



Courageous Nigerian soldiers - defending their fatherland, well equipped

speaking to newsmen at the headquarters of the counter terrorist group in Maiduguri on Monday, February 10.

And on February 18, it was reported by Sahara Reporters that the insurgents invaded Korongilum, a community in Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State. Though, there were no reports of people killed, the terrorists were said to have shot sporadically into the air and burnt down houses while the villagers scamped for safety.

In the last six months the atrocities of the Boko Haram insurgents and those of their counterparts like the Fulani herdsmen, Bandits in Zamfara State; and other parts of the country have been at an alarming rate and directed mostly against Christians. The incidents have attracted comments from within and outside the country; questioning the seeming inability of the country's security forces to curtail these terrorists and provide adequate security for the people of the country and their properties. It has also brought to fore, the worrisome indifference of the Federal Government in dealing with the situation; by overhauling the leadership of the country's security apparatus.

In a statement issued in Lagos on February 4 and titled: Walls Have Ears the emeritus Catholic Archbishop of Lagos, Anthony Cardinal Okogie articulated nine incidents of the atrocities committed by the Boko Haram insurgents between December 12, 2019 and January 9, 2020. Ironically, the country's security apparatus has not been able to bring to book any of the members of this dreaded Islamic sect to face

the wrath of the law for the culpable offence. The country has more military/other security agencies checkpoints than Israel and the Middle East put together, one therefore wonders how these killers are able to beat the security network mounted by the country's security agents and get to the places where they have committed their criminal activities without being caught, noticed or prevented from carrying out their dastardly acts.

In the words of Cardinal Okogie, "incontrovertible evidence abounds that government is simply incapable of protecting the land and the people" and How many innocent Nigerians will be killed before our government and its functionaries admit that Nigeria is not winning the war against terrorism?" In its over one decade of atrocious activities in the country, Boko Haram insurgents have killed over 37,000 innocent citizens without any justification, including members of their Islamic faith; burnt down Churches and Mosques, attacked education institutions, killing students and maimed several thousands of innocent citizens of the country. While they are claiming to be killing in the name of Islam; leaders of the religion have insisted that Islam is a religion of peace, and have condemned the activities of these fundamentalists. However, leaders of the Islamic Religion have not done enough to bring these paranoid followers of Islam to sanity. As for their Fulani herdsmen counterpart, they have killed over 3,000 peasant farmers across the nation, while the Zamfara bandits are also in a hurry to outnumber their "seniors" in the killing spree figure.

Two former Heads of State and professional contemporaries of President Muhammadu Buhari with who they jointly prevented the country from growing through the pupilage of democracy by staging military coups and put the country in the bondage of military rule of over three decades; Generals Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida and Abdulsalami Abubakar; have recently joined the cortege of elder statesmen who want to help President Buhari to salvage Nigeria from disintegration as a result of insecurity and brigandage of the different groups of terrorists ravaging the country.

In a recent exclusive interview with the Daily Trust on Sunday newspaper. General Babangida's panacea for defeating Boko Haram is an enhanced intelligence gathering by the nation's security agencies to be able to tackle the multiple security challenges facing the country. According to the former Military Head of State noted that the war against the Boko Haram sect is not a conventional one, hence, the security agencies need more intelligence for their operations, leadership and character to be able to check them. The former military president also spoke on the establishment of regional security outfits such as Amotekun and Shege Ka Fasa, and calls for the removal of the service chiefs.

Speaking at Founders' day of Pamo University of Medical Sciences (PUMS) in Port Harcourt, River State, recently, General Abdulsalami expressed concern on the worsening insecurity in the country, saying: "It is high time we stood up to fight this insecurity in the country." He called for greater commitment in the fight against the monster on the part of all stakeholders in the Nigerian nation project and advocated change of tactics in addressing the issue.

That the figure of the victims of the atrocities of the terrorist groups are mainly Christians is not accidental, when one considers the lukewarm attitude of President Buhari towards the attitude of these religious and ethnic murderers; and the unwillingness of the security agencies to protect their fellow Nigerians who have no means of defending themselves.

Speaking at the burial of the slain young Michael Nnadi of the Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna on Thursday, February 11, 2020, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna, Most Rev Matthew Ndagoso declared: "... in our entire history as a sovereign nation, we never had it this bad in terms of insecurity. Virtually every part of our country is today affected by security challenges, some more than others. The nation is under siege by insurgents, bandits, kidnappers, cattle rustlers etc."

Piqued by the complacency of President Muhammadu Buhari on the threat of insecurity tearing the country apart and; the killing of the Boko Haram insurgents in the name of Religion and that the Fulani herdsmen in the name of ethnic cleansing, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese in his homily at the burial of Michael Nnadi declared: "This is the moment that separates darkness from light, good from evil. Our nation is like a ship stranded on the high seas, rudderless and with broken navigational aids."

Regretting that the President has reneged on his promise at an international gathering at Chatham House, in London before his election in 2015, to rout Boko when elected; Bishop Kukah stated: "This President has displayed the greatest degree of insensitivity in managing our country's rich diversity. He has subordinated the larger interests of the country to the hegemonic interests of his co-religionists and clansmen and women. The impression created now is that, to hold a key and strategic position in Nigeria today, it is more important to be a northern Muslim than a Nigerian."

On the claim that the Boko Haram terrorists are not fighting a religious war the erudite Catholic Bishop declared: "We are being told that this situation has nothing to do with Religion,



When the cattle is more precious than that of an average Nigerian.

Really? It is what happens when politicians use religion to extend the frontiers of their ambition and power. Are we to believe that simply because Boko Haram kills Muslims too, they wear no religious garb? Are we to deny the evidence before us, of kidnappers separating Muslims from infidels or compelling Christians to convert or die?" he added that "the persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria is as old as the modern Nigerian state. Their experiences and fears of northern, Islamic domination are documented in the Willinks Commission Report way back in 1956."

Just as the various groups of terrorists in the country increase their assaults on innocent citizens on daily basis, more Nigerian leaders have continued on daily basis to call on the country's first citizen to live up to his election promises of protecting the life and properties of all Nigerians irrespective of their differences.

Without prejudice to the issue of religion, the Sultan of Sokoto and President General, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), speaking at the National Mosque in Abuja, early this month called on the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency on security while government should use all its agencies and all possible means to "arrest this descent into anarchy."

Stressing that the country cannot continue to shed the blood of innocent citizens unjustly and human security being at its lowest ebb; the Sultan declared: "The situation of Nigeria Today is desperate and desperate situations require desperate measures in the collective interest of well-meaning Nigerians. Let the monster of insecurity be tackled actively and proactively with the full weight of Nigeria's security and defense capacity."

He added: Nigerians are dying needlessly to the satisfaction of evil-minded political profiteers, ethnic irredentists and pseudo-religious agitators disguising as religious leaders. All hands must be on deck to arrest this ugly trend given that the primary purpose of government is the security of life and property of the governed."

Also, speaking at the Northern Security Meeting of the Ahmadu Bello Memorial Foundation in Kaduna on February 6; the former Speaker of the House of Representatives R.t. Honourable Yakubu Dogara expressed concern that the North has become epicenter and theatre of violence in Nigeria". While articulating the challenges of insecurity in the region, the former Speaker noted that the "the real problem is that we have failed to provide leadership and organ that works for all." He added: "Violence is taking roots because our leadership has been exposed as a lie, an empty ideology

used to satiate greed instead of addressing inequality and injustice."

The general consensus of all stakeholder groups leaders is the need for the overhaul of the country's security architecture, change of tactics and game plan as well as the replacement of the present team of the nation's security outfits and injection of fresh blood with new ideas and desire to serve and save their fatherland.

Nigeria, by her 1999 Constitution (as amended) is a Secular State, and therefore, the practice of religion is optional as there is no State Religion. Also, by the virtue of the Constitution every Nigerian can live in any part of Nigeria and practice the faith of his choice anywhere without hindrance. But this has not been the case with our great nation, Nigeria, especially in the North. Before the advent of the Boko Haram insurgency, Religion tolerance in the Northern part of the country has been more of a paper work than in actual practice; as most governments in the North, even since the time of the First Premier and Sardauna of Sokoto, late Sir Ahmadu Bello. In the North, Christian denominations are not allowed to build churches or any of the institutions in the choice places in any of the states of the region, even, if they had adequate followers. Thus the practice of freedom of religion has always been a practice of the South.

Therefore, when the Boko Haram insurgents came with their religion hostility in the name of making the North and Islamic State, starting with the North East, region, they had a fertile ground, prepared for them by the Islam oriented State Governments of the North tacitly supported by the Federal Power in Abuja.

Today, Boko Haram has become a nemesis for the religion intolerance of the North and a danger to the fragile peace and unity of the country. In its ten years of atrocities, the terrorist group has always focused on the elimination of Christians; but now-a-days the murderers are either advertently or inadvertently killing Muslims



Hooded Boko Haram insurgents and bandits on rampage in the land

Heroic Burial For Slayed Seminarist

If those who killed the late Michael Ikechukwu Nnadi, a seminarist of the Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna, knew that they were making a hero and martyr of the 18-year old orphan, they might have had a re-thing. In the words of Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, in his homily at the funeral Mass, the choice of Michael as “a Simon of Cyrene is a remarkable gift that we must embrace with both hands. We feel as if our son has been chosen to represent us in the national team of martyrs. Without fear, we will complete the journey he started because his memory will give us strength.” He added: We are honoured that our son has been summoned to receive the crown of martyrdom at the infancy of his journey to the priesthood.” The late Michael was kidnapped along with three other seminarists by armed men, suspected to be members of the Boko Haram terrorist group, who invaded the premises of the institution on Wednesday, January 8, 2020. He was buried amidst tears and consternation by members of the family, students of the seminary, Rev. Fathers, Religious, lay faithful and sympathizers from Sokoto Diocese and other dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Kaduna Archdiocese. It was an impressive crowd of Rev. Fathers, Religious, Seminarists and lay faithful, led by the Catholic



Late Michael Nnadi

Archbishop of Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province, Most Rev. Matthew Ndagoso that gave the young seminarist a befitting farewell as he journeyed back to his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. The late Michael Nnadi, who was killed by his abductors, after collecting ransom was buried at the premises of the seminary on Tuesday, February 11, 2020. The funeral Mass was presided over by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese from where the late Nnadi entered the Good Shepherd Major Seminary to complete his priesthood studies. The other colleagues of the slain seminarist that were released by the abductors are: Kanwai Pius, Stephen Amos and Peter Umenukor. All the students are of the philosophy at the Seminary. Bishop Kukah, in his homily berated the insensitivity of the government to the issue of insecurity and use of religion to cause division and encourage violence. Regretting that the country is like a ship stranded on the high seas; the Bishop declared: “Today, our years of hypocrisy, duplicity, fabricated integrity, false piety, empty morality, fraud and Pharisaism have caught up with us. Nigeria is on the crossroads and its future hangs precariously in a balance.

While noting that the noble religion of Islam has convulsed and become associated with some of the worst fears, Bishop Kukah remarked that “... neither the Islam nor the north can identify any real benefits from these years that have been consumed by the locusts that this government has unleashed on our country.” He noted that the north has become one large grave yard, a valley of dry bones, the nastiest and the most brutish part of the country, due to the insensitivity of the President of the country to the harvest of deaths being perpetrated by the Boko Haram terrorists and the Fulani herdsmen.



Late Mrs. Ataga Philip - killed along with Michael Nnadi



Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso



Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah - Chief Mourner

The bishop while commiserating with the family of the deceased, especially the aged grandmother who nurtured him and his twin brother from a very tender age; his fellow seminarians, the faithful of Sokoto Diocese as well as all grieved Nigerians, especially Christians; Bishop Kukah admonished all not to seek revenge but adhere strictly to the tenets of their faith. He declared: "The boundaries between faith and reason are delicate but they are fundamental to how a society builds a morale code."

He continued: "Faith without reason breeds the fanatic, the demagogue who genuinely but wrongly believes that he has heard the voice of a god ordering him to kill another. Reason with faith produces the ideologies who will also kill because the ideology of the state orders him to do so. Societies can only survive when a Constitutional basis has been established to create a balance between both extremes and to place our common humanity at the centre of every pursuit."

In his address, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna

Archdiocese, Most Rev. Matthew Ndagoso commiserated with the grandmother and other members of the family of the deceased, the family of God of the Sokoto Diocese jurisdiction under the leadership of Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah; and the Rector, staff and students of the Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna.

While admonishing the faithful not to feel despondent or abandoned by God, as a result of the incident, Archbishop Ndagoso reiterate his concern about the state of insecurity in the country and the need for the government to address the issue with the urgency it deserves and find permanent solution to the monster before it consumes the country.

The Archbishop declared: "Dear friends, the cry of anguish of Israel in its darkest moment is today the cry of our dear nation, Nigeria. It is especially the cry of northern states ravaged by insurgency, banditry, kidnappings for ransom, cattle rustling, herders/farmers clashed, armed robbery etc. It is the cry of Kaduna State and particularly the cry of Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province, of the Diocese of Sokoto and of the Good Shepherd Major Seminary."



Seminarians of the Good Shepherd Major Seminary carrying the coffin containing the remains of the late Michael Nnadi

Jos Ecclesiastical Province Counts Blessings At 25

From Beatrice Earland, Bauchi

It was a low keyed celebration moved by the dictate of the time, but the Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful of the Jos ecclesiastical Province gathered at the St John's Cathedral, Bauchi, to give gratitude to God for His blessings and graciousness which have made the Church in the province to grow impressively, amidst challenges and difficulties. The celebration of the Mass, which had all the local ordinaries of the Suffragan Dioceses in attendance; was presided over by the then Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama.

In his homily at the Mass, Archbishop Kaigama, charged the government to be more proactive in the protection of the life and properties of the citizens. He also tasked the people to expose evildoers in their midst to curtail the wanton destruction of lives and property so as to bring to an end the violence that has permeated the nation especially the northern part of the country.

Archbishop decreed that the province comprising of dioceses in Plateau and northeastern states despite being the worse hit with religious and ethnic clashes, is still standing strong and growing from strength to strength. He urged the lay faithful to stand firm in the face adversity and be ready to be true Christians and shun acts that will be detrimental to their Faith. He called on Christians and Muslims to exhibit a love that has no boundary as the nation is in dire need of peace.



Group Photograph of the Bishops of Jos Ecclesiastical Province. Third from left is Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese.

"Let us pray for a stop to the violence. We pray that the violence will stop in the name of Jesus. We pray for conversion of hearts. We pray for repentance on the part of those causing this havoc, the destruction of lives and property"; he declared. He also admonished the Federal Government and the security agencies to do more in curtailing the activities of the criminals who say "they are killing in the name of God". "We hope government will take their responsibility seriously, the soldiers and other security agents need to be involved and more serious," the Archbishop added.

He continued: "We need to pray that the violence will reduce and if violence will reduce in Nigeria, we must exhibit a love that has no boundary, we must love one another irrespective of religious, ethnic or political difference. We need peace in Nigeria."



Group Photograph of the Bishops after the opening Mass of the 2019 National Mission Congress held in Benin, last year.

JOS ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE CLOCKS 25



Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese presiding at the Thanksgiving Mass



Cross section of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province in a group photograph with some security officers.



The Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province introducing themselves to the faithful after the Thanksgiving Mass.



Group photograph of the Bishops and some Priests of the Ecclesiastical Province after the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass.



The Bishops blessing the leaders of the various faithful groups in the Ecclesiastical Province.



The Ecclesiastical Province Bishops and representatives of the faithful groups cutting the Anniversary cake.

Essential Virtue for Successful Priestly Life Outlined

Perseverance has been described as an essential virtue for a successful priestly life and those who have embraced the vocation have been urged to remain steadfast and shun earthly possessions which do not guarantee eternal happiness. This message was given by the Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese, Most Rev. Patrick Eluke in his homily at the recent Silver Jubilee celebration of Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Opelema, the Vicar General of Bomadi Diocese.

Noting that call to the priesthood is a great responsibility, Bishop Eluke stated that those called to the vocation must persevere in the ministry by doing what God expects them to do. He admonished: "My dear brother priests, you have left everything to follow Christ. ... Do not let your heart be troubled, the master will say to you, he will bless you a hundred fold and that is why you are a happy priest today".

Urging priests to shun earthly possessions, Bishop Eluke continued: "happiness does not persist in possession; do not mind what you find around you, or the display of affluence by people around you but remain a happy priest and remain who you are" by embracing more the Blessed Sacrament and the Rosary

Bishop Eluke also used the occasion to appeal to the lay faithful to continue to support and pray for their priests because they have not accepted the call of God for themselves alone but for all the faithful. He added that both the priests and the lay faithful play complimentary role to each other in the Church. Noting that earthly possession is vanity, Bishop Eluke urged all to focus on the everlasting life in heaven instead of concentrating on earthly possessions. He emphasized that priests should shun earthly possessions and not be bothered or tempted by affluence of the people that surround them.

Going down memory lane on the priestly life of the celebrant, Bishop Eluke remarked: "I have known you for 39 years, you are still a very happy priest, the happiness that comes from responsibility, commitment and prayer, sense of sacrifice and love. We are sure you love your vocation and God. While commending him for serving God, the Church and humanity meritoriously for the past 25 years, amidst moments of glories and difficulties the homilist reminded Fr. Opelema that the words of the day's Scripture are meant to encourage and set him on a new course for more missionary activities

Speaking at the ceremony, the Bishop of Bomadi Diocese, Most Rev. Hyacinth Egbebo MSP, congratulated and commended the celebrant for serving God and the Church meritoriously, and also expressed gratitude to all who attended the ceremony, especially members of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN); in the state who have joined the faithful of the diocese to honour a worthy son and servant of Christ.

BUY AND READ

THE CSN NEWS ALWAYS



Most Rev. Patrick Eluke

CALL FOR SPECIAL DAY FOR THANKSGIVING

By Rev. Fr. Kuha INDYER CSSp

A lecturer at the Benue State University, Makurdi, who is also a Chaplain of the Good Shepherd Chaplaincy, at the same University, Very Rev. Fr. Pius Ajiki, PhD, has called on the church to establish a Thanksgiving Day to appreciate priests for their selfless humanitarian services. Fr. Ajiki made the call at the St. John the Baptist Cathedral Church, Gboko on October 5, 2019 on the occasion of the 35th priestly ordination anniversary and 61st birthday of his classmate, Very Rev. Fr. Godwin Terwase Agberagba. The university Don said such an act would encourage priests in their struggles to make the world a better place. The theme of his homily was: 'The gift of the priesthood is from God himself'.

According to the homilist, Hebrews 5 says every priest is selected by God and anointed by God to offer sacrifices for himself and for the people. Priests do a lot of work for the good of people as a result of the Divine task such as saying Masses, baptising, counseling and attending to the sick, etc. He said therefore that it is good that we should have a day of thanksgiving to appreciate priests with the aim of encouraging them.

Fr. Ajiki outlined three categories of priests. The first category are those who do not go to offices begging for financial assistance because they are ashamed of begging. The second category are those who are very industrious. They are able to go out of their mission areas to solicit support from people to enable them carry on with the proclamation of the gospel. And the last category are those who dedicate themselves to prayer and sometimes do not go to the outstations to say Masses. But then what is common to all the categories of priests is that they all celebrate the Mass. It is for this reason that we should appreciate them as they are representatives of Christ. They continue to do what Christ did. It was in the spirit of appreciation and thanksgiving that the laity and the clergy had gathered to appreciate Fr. Godwin Agberagba for his faithful service to the church for the past 35 years.

In his address, Most Rev. Matthew Audu, Bishop of Lafia Diocese and classmate of the celebrant called on the invited guests to support the celebrant and keep him alive to reach 50 years in the priesthood.

He also used the occasion to task priests to have personal experience with Jesus.

IBADAN ARCHDIOCESE ROLLS OUT THE DRUMS

To celebrate Archbishop Abegunrin @ 70

It was indeed a day of worthy celebration when the faithful of Ibadan Archdiocese on 21st of December, 2010, rolled out the drums to celebrate the 70th Birthday of their Chief Shepherd, Most Rev. Gabriel Abegunrin. The ceremony which took place at the Church of the Ascension, Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo State, was attended by a powerful delegation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), led by its President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze; dignitaries from all walks of life from different parts of the country; traditional rulers; priests, religious, Knights of the Church and lay faithful from the Ecclesiastical Province of Ibadan.

In his homily at the celebration of the Mass, Bishop Jude Arogundade of Ondo Diocese noted that the celebration of birthday is not only to express gratitude to God for His blessings and graces but also an opportunity to measure the positive impact of one's life on the people and the society, during the period of time. Commending the celebrant for his exemplary priestly life, humility, devotion, dedication, love and concern for the spiritual and pastoral well-being of his flock as a chief Shepherd of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province; Bishop Arogundade declared: "The worth of seventy years, lived in the service of God and man is measured by the good impacts the years have made on the people. We salute you for the sacrifices of the past years and the leadership that have lit the way for so many people."

Bishop Arogundade went down memory lane on the life of the celebrant, most of which have been in the service of humanity to the glory of God as priest and Bishop, and noted: "As challenging as your responsibilities were, in an uncomplaining manner you gave your best, not thinking about self-interest. The only interest that mattered was the good of the Church." The Local Ordinary of Ondo Diocese also spoke on the life of the Church and her challenges, the Pastoral office of Bishops; emphasizing that the celebrant leads the Church in Yorubaland "that is highly moralistic and traditionalistic"; outlining the values, traditions, life and cultures of the race in the

perspective of the doctrine and life of the Catholic Church.

The homilist also used the occasion to remind the people that leadership problem is not limited to the political arena alone, but exist in every sector of the society. According to him: "It is a generally accepted fact that Nigeria's problem is that of leadership."

This does not exclude the Church leadership.

The complex realities of our nation have led to an unprecedented competition for dominance and control, and outright adoption of policies that prey on the law abiding citizens and the vulnerable."

Regretting that there is a general atmosphere of apathy and disaffection in the country, Bishop

Arogundade declared: "Our national conscience has been so weakened as result of long years of adopting policies that take law abiding and patriotic citizens for granted."

Speaking at the ceremony, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); Most Rev.

Augustine Obiora Akubeze noted that Archbishop Abegunrin has allowed the grace of God to bear fruits in his life and the Church in Nigeria rejoices with him for what he has done with the gift of life." He concluded that the celebrant is a man with strong burning desire for inculturation; stressing: "His love and wishes are for our culture to be reflected in our Liturgy in a way that respect both our Africanities and our Catholic belief." The ceremony was rounded up with a reception at which all the guests were lavishly entertained.



Archbishop Abegunrin



The Word of God is Alive !

BENIN PROVINCE CELEBRATES SILVER JUBILEE

The Bishops, Priests Religious and faithful of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province, gathered recently at the St Paul Catholic Church, Benin City to celebrate the silver jubilee of the creation of the Ecclesiastical Province. The celebration was led by the Metropolitan of the Province and the Archbishop of Benin City; Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze.

Addressing the faithful of the Ecclesiastical Province, Archbishop Akubeze called on all offers of Lay Apostolate Groups and Organizations in the province to submit a comprehensive report on their activities for the purpose of adequate information on the progress of each group in the province.

"As part of the events marking our jubilee celebration, we direct that the executive of the provincial organizations, societies and lay apostolate groups send in a detailed report of their annual activities at the end of each calendar year through their diocesan secretariats to us the provincial bishops in order for us to determine the progress we are making as a province and also to examine areas of concern," the Archbishop declared.



Group Photograph of the Bishops of Benin City Ecclesiastical Province. Third from right is Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Province

Going down memory lane on the history of the province, Archbishop Akubeze disclosed that Prior to the time of the creation of Benin Province, this entire province had been under the then Lagos Ecclesiastical Province at a time when there were three (3) provinces in the whole of Nigeria – Lagos, Onitsha and Kaduna which were all created between 1950 and 1953. He said it took another forty years before the next provinces were created. These he said were an additional six (6) of which Benin City was one of them, making it nine (9) in all, a figure which still stands till the present. He added: "our journey as a province has been quite eventful. It has been a journey of remarkable success and all glory must go to God".

Other Bishops in the Province present at the celebration include, the Bishop of Warri, Most Rev. John Afareha; the Bishop of Issele-Uku, Most Rev. Michael Elue; the Bishop of Auchi, Most Rev. Gabriel Dunia; the Bishop of Uromi, Most Rev. Donatus Ogun, OSA; and the Bishop of Bomadi, Most Rev. Hyacinth Egbebo, MSP. Also present was the first Archbishop of the Metropolitan See, Emeritus Archbishop Patrick. E. Ekpu.

In his homily at the celebration of the Mass, Bishop Hyacinth Egbebo of Bomadi Diocese, described the celebration as a sign of unity of the various diocese for the past 25 years, hence he said all should be grateful to God for "the memorable gift of the province"



Cross section of Rev. Frs. at the opening Mass for the 4th National Mission Congress held in Benin, Edo State, last year.

Army General thanks God for elevation to next Rank

By Fr Henry Ogonwa

The act of thanksgiving is a gift from God. It is an invaluable asset among those who possess it. The gift enables an attitude of going back to whoever has done someone a favour to say, thank you. It is a priceless virtue that portrays a person's personality whether he/she is a grateful person or an ingrate.

A grateful person exhibits immense maturity, good morals and deep spirituality. God blesses such persons while the society and community honour them. This act of gratitude to God for His blessings and favours received was expressed on the 25th of January, 2020 by Major General Lawrence Ayaegbunem Fejokwu of Onicha Ugbo. The event was a thanksgiving Mass for his elevation/promotion to the rank of a Major General in the Nigerian Army. Thus Onicha Ugbo was thrown into a beehive of activities as friends, colleagues/associates of the celebrant from different parts of the country converged on All Saints Catholic Church Onicha Ugbo to celebrate the Soldier and gentleman, Major General Lawrence Fejokwu.

The event attracted Priests and Religious from different parts of the country as Military Chaplains led by Rev. Fr. Brigadier General Charles Iroegbu led the other Priest Chaplains to Onicha Ugbo. There were Priests from Issele Uku and Warri Dioceses, Abuja and Onitsha Archdioceses as well who gathered to rejoice and celebrate with the Fejokwu's family. The homily of the day was given by the Parish Priest of All Saints Onicha Ugbo, Rev. Fr. Peter Mobuogwu. Fr. Peter recalled that exactly four years ago, Major General Lawrence came to the All Saints Church in thanksgiving for his elevation as a Brigadier General in the Nigerian Army being the first one in their immediate environment to attain such height in the Nigerian Army. On that occasion, we rejoiced and prayed for more blessings and elevation.

Four years after, another elevation and thanksgiving is taking place in the same church. According to the Priest, we have gathered again in thanksgiving for yet another elevation to a Major General. It takes



Major General Lawrence Ayaegbunem Fejokwu

a lot to achieve an elevation or promotion in the Army. Being a Major General, required a lot: mental abilities, psychological stability, physical abilities, strong health, good sense of leadership skills etc. The reason for our celebration, is that our own son has attained this unprecedented height in the Nigerian Army. We congratulate you on this achievement. It is God's own doing. Speaking to the celebrant he said, it is because have remained committed to your faith, your family, your profession that good things continue to come your way. May God do more for you.

Fr Mobuogwu reiterated that Solomon asked God for wisdom when he prayed and God gave it to him. After the building of the Temple, Solomon came back to thank God. In the same way, our Mother Mary thanked God for the honour done her (my soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour). This is thanksgiving. It is vital and a good virtue. God is interested in our thanksgiving. He demanded it of the 9 lepers. The Nigerian Army is bedeviled today with lots of challenges, from Boko Haram, banditry, kidnapping, militancy, etc. The Army is doing so much for the protection of lives and properties of Nigerians. May God continue to bless and protect them. Despite the strength of the Jewish Army, the Bible teaches us that they conquered their battles with the help of God. In conclusion, he prayed the Lord help our Nigerian Army to be victorious in their campaigns. He prayed for the celebrant asking that his name protects him, Ayaegbunem. Gathered in the celebration also were Senator Peter Nwaoboshi, Hon Ndudi Elumelu, the Obi of Onicha Ugbo, Obi of Issele Uku, Obi of Ubulu- Unor.

The Governor of Delta State was represented by the Commissioner for Finance. In attendance were several Army Generals and other officers. It was a gathering of Christians and Muslims. At the end of Mass guests were lavishly entertained with food and choral displays. The celebrant, Major General Lawrence Fejokwu appreciated God for His blessings and favours upon him and his family. He thanked all who came to honour him with their presence and presents. He thanked his military family and his immediate family. He acknowledged the clergy and prayed God to bless and lead everyone safely home.



R-L: Bishops Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo, Hyacinth Egbebo of Bomadi and Peter Odetoyinbo at the 2019 CBCN Second Plenary in Abeokuta.

New Deacons advised to live exemplary life

The Catholic Diocese of Yola has begun the year twenty twenty with ordination of two deacons, preparatory to their priestly ordination.

The Catholic Bishop of Yola Diocese, Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza who presided over the ordination ceremony at Saint Francis Catholic Church reminded the newly transitional ordained deacons to live exemplary life by serving God with love and joy.

Bishop Mamza, while congratulating the newly ordained deacons brother Philip Paulus and Clifford Okeke, thanked them for their courage and dedication in giving their lives to priesthood.

He reminded them that as ordained deacons, they are to help the Bishop and the priests by assisting them in celebrating Holy Mass, partake in burial rights and administer sacrament among others.

Bishop Mamza then said as deacons "they are expected to defend the Catholic faith and stand for the church. In his new year message, Bishop Mamza advised the



Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza flanked by the newly ordained Deacons

congregation to evaluate their lives and ensure they live in accordance with teaching of Jesus Christ.

He appealed to both Christians and Muslims to continue to live peacefully with one another.

Bishop Mamza lauds Missio for support to the Diocese

By Jessica John Bakari

The Catholic Bishop of Yola Diocese, Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza has lauded the effort of missio of Germany for its support to the church.

Bishop Dami Mamza stated this when he received the 8-man delegation from missio Germany led by their President Reverend Father Dirk Bengener at saint Theresa Cathedral Jimeta.

The Bishop, said missio is a Roman Catholic organization which has been in partnership with different Churches across Nigeria.

He pointed out that, Missio has supported Yola Diocese in several ways including, building father's houses sinking of boreholes for some communities, churches and pastoral centers among others.

The Catholic Bishop of Yola Diocese who thanked the delegation for their continuous support Mission Germany, noted that the main purpose of their visit to Yola Diocese is to monitor the ongoing projects supported by them.

Mamza announced that missio have also reiterate their commitment by supporting Catholic Diocese of Yola in building eighty six houses for internally displaced person's located in Jambilamba in Gerie Local Government.

In his remark, the President of Missio Reverend Father Dirk Bengener said this is his first time of visiting Nigeria and commended Bishop Dami Mamza and other leaders for the good work they have been doing.

Reverend Father Dirk added that he will not only support the Church financially but also spiritually and promised to intensify prayers for peace to continue to prevail in the country.



Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza with Rev. Fr. Dirk Bengener of Missio of Germany.

**I will go before you and will
be with you; I will never
leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid.**

Deuteronomy 31:8:

The Archbishop of Benin City Metropolitan See and President of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev Augustine Obiora Akubeze has called on Catholic lawyers to intensify efforts at rendering legal service to facilitate the quick release of inmates that are awaiting trial in the various Correctional Institutions across the country, noting that, "the cry of the inmates in Nigerian Prisons are the obligation of Catholic Lawyers" Archbishop Akubeze gave this charge while celebrating Mass with members of the Catholic Lawyers Association in the Archdiocese. The ceremony took place at St. Paul Catholic Church, Benin City. The Archbishop stated that more than half of the inmates in the Correctional Services are awaiting trial, adding that some of these inmates are awaiting trial for alleged offences that even if they are convicted the time served in the prison is longer than the maximum jail time they will be sentenced to.

He declared: "Every year I visit the two prisons in Benin City, I listen to the inmates, it is the same story; it is the same cry similar to that of the widow in today's Gospel. We as a Church have been trying to provide help through JDPC, we have been providing spiritual care, we have been helping with improving the quality of life of the inmates by providing computers, and repair of vehicles, sinking of bore hole etc. We know that there are still many things to do to help these brothers and sisters in prison. My special appeal to you today is to help specifically in helping inmates awaiting trial; to help with the Government to grant pardon to some of the inmates who have been awaiting trial for a long time and are of good behaviour; to help create a rehabilitation centre to be run by the Church for inmates who are released from prison. This facility will help to integrate them properly into the society."

Archbishop Akubeze however declared that, people



Archbishop Augustine Akubeze (3rd from left) with some members of the association

CATHOLIC LAWYERS URGED TO ASSIST PRISON INMATES

must never forget that no crime can wipe away the dignity of a human being, while calling on the Legal workers to work with all relevant bodies to ensure that they follow what Pope Francis has directed - an end to the death penalty.

High point of the Thanksgiving Mass was the blessing of the various tools of all lawyers present by the Archbishop. Present at the celebration were, the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Benin City and Chaplain of Catholic Lawyers, Very Rev Fr. Augustine Ehigie, the Dean of Benin City, Very Rev Fr. Dr Edwin Omorogbe, the President of Catholic Lawyers Association, Barr. Eric Okojie, the Presiding Judge of the Criminal Division of the Edo State Judiciary, Hon Justice J.I. Asha and the former President of the Customary Court of Appeal in Edo State, Hon Justice B. I. Isibor.

Also present were some Senior Advocates of Nigeria, led by Chief Solomon Asemota, the Chairman of the Benin City Branch of Nigeria Barristers Association and Prince Collins Benson Ogiegbian, member of the Archdiocesan Legal Commission, amongst others.

BISHOP AFAREHA ADVISES PRIESTS ON RETREAT

Bishop John Oke Oghene Afareha of Warri Diocese has admonished priests of the diocese to make retreat part of their vocation life so as to enjoy the spiritual benefits that accompany the exercise. The bishop gave the admonishment while addressing the priests during their annual retreat for the year 2020, held at the Jubilee Hotel, Retreat and Resort Centre, Effurum, Delta State.

Welcoming the priests and Religious working in the diocese to the spiritual exercise, Bishop Afareha thanked God for the gift of life and graces given to them to function effectively in the priestly ministry, and called on the priests to ensure they participate wholeheartedly in the retreat without distraction. He called for perfect vision in discerning the will of God and striving to live out the missionary mandate entrusted to them by God through the Church.

The 2020 annual priests retreat was directed by Very Rev. Fr.

Sylvanus Anamali, a Spiritual Theologian from the Diocese of Warri and it lasted from January 20 to January 25. The annual priests retreat is a time set aside for the priests to have private prayers, brief rest, recollections and renewal of their priestly commitment and also to have a total reunion with the bishop of the diocese in whose priestly ministry they all share.



"Our Mission is to make Christ known"

Fr. Augustine Adetola

In continuation of his Canonical Pastoral Visitation to Ogbere Deanery, the Catholic Bishop of Ijebu-Ode Diocese, Most Rev. Francis Obafemi Adesina visited St. Thomas Catholic Parish, Agbure from 19th - 20th January, 2020. He was received with great joy and dancing from the entrance of the town by Parishioners both from the main station and out-stations who came out in large numbers to welcome the Chief Shepherd of the diocese.

Having been welcomed at the entrance of the Church by the Priest-in-charge of the Parish, Rev. Fr. Udo Iwuji, SDV, the Bishop proceeded straight to prepare for the Mass since the visit started on a Sunday morning. During the mass, the Priest-in-charge welcomed the Bishop to St. Thomas Parish, Agbure and introduced the parishioners from various stations to him.

In his homily at the Mass, Bishop Adesina expressed his joy of having the opportunity to visit the Parish for the first time. He said that he has come to see how vibrant the Parish community really is and he expressed satisfaction that he wasn't disappointed with what he saw at the mass. Reflecting on the readings of the day, the Bishop said that "we all have a mission to make Christ known to the world. By our baptism, we have all been commissioned to go out and preach the gospel." He enjoined all the faithful to make sure that they show Christ daily in their community.

After the Mass, there was a meeting of the laity with the Bishop. During the meeting, members of the various stations from Ligun, Camp II, Ogun camp, Ilusin, Lomiro and Agbure all shared their joys and challenges with the Bishop, who listened patiently



Most Rev. Francis Adesina

to them. The Bishop, in his reply, assured the people that the church will always care for them; he charged them also not to relent but have a change of attitude in being Catholics and not wait for the Bishop to do everything for them.

Bishop Adesina in company with the Priest-in-charge and the members of the pastoral council, later paid a courtesy visit to the Chief Imam of Ilusin at his private residence. The Chief Imam welcomed the Bishop and his entourage and expressed his joy at the visit. He praised the Catholic Church for what she is doing in the midst of several Christian denominations and her role in maintaining peace and cordial relationship in the society. The Bishop also thanked the Chief Imam for his kind words and stated the purpose for his visit which is geared towards maintaining a good cordial relationship with our Muslim brothers and sisters. He said that both Christians and Muslims should always see themselves as brothers and sisters from the same Mother and Father.

Bishop Okoye urges more Love for humanity, care for the environment

Story by Chioma Ndife

The Auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Awka Diocese, Most Rev. Jonas Benson Okoye, has said that 2020 will herald hope if every individual develops the mindset of getting things done in the right way. According to him, getting things right was the only ultimate method of lifting the economy and creating a better environment and atmosphere for peaceful co-existence.

Bishop Okoye stated this in an exclusive interview with Fides Newspaper while speaking on the political and socio-economic challenges facing the Nigerian nation.

'2020 can never get better if we do nothing. For this year to herald hope, everyone must develop this mindset of doing things the

right way. Getting things right will stabilize our economy, help us to create a better environment and atmosphere of peaceful co-existence. Let's all get back to the drawing board and work out modalities of how to get things right.

Getting things right should be the collective goal of all of us, especially in our country, Nigeria. The political and religious leaders cannot do it all. 'In as much as they have greater responsibility in repositioning things, everyone has something to do, no matter the position of such a person. Let us all do our part from our positions, no matter how little the position is. The truth of the matter is that we need to start somewhere,' Bishop Okoye said.

The bishop stressed the need for every Nigerian to develop more love, care, and concern for the person next door, saying

Archbishop Valerian blesses new Mother Abbess of St Scholastica Monastery Umuoji

By Francis Okoye

The Metropolitan Archbishop of Onitsha, His Grace, Most Rev Dr Valerian OKEKE has administered the Abbatial blessing on Rev mother Mary Ruphina Chukwuka (OSB) as the new Mother Abbess of St Scholastica Benedictine Abbey Umuoji on Nov 17, 2019.

The event kicked off the celebration of a Holy Mass presided over by the Archbishop, highlights of which included the Abbatial blessing of the new Mother Abbess and handing of the pastoral staff (shepherds staff) and ring to the new Abbess by the Archbishop.

In his sermon, Archbishop Okeke told the faithful present that he would not say a homily but a short prayer for the new Abbess. He pleaded with all to join in prayers for her, so that the spirit of Christ as first given to our father Benedict be given to her. He also prayed for her to have the spirit of St Benedict who wrote the rule of monastic life over 1000 years ago and is still in use till today without amendments in every monastery. He observed that even other religious communities like Moslems, Buddhist, Hindus and even atheists use the rule as a guide.

"We pray that God gives you a spirit of prayer like St Benedict. Prayer that moves mountains. Spirit that does the impossible," he prayed.

Archbishop Okeke called on Catholics to support the monastery financially, as they spend most of their time praying for the faithful.



The new Mother Abbess (holding staff of authority) in a group photograph with Archbishop Valerian Okeke, Priests and Nuns at the ceremony

Other dignitaries present at the event included HE Mr Peter Obi, former Governor of Anambra State, Governor Willie Obiano who was represented by Prof Kate Omenugha, HRH IGWE Dr Innocent Elochukwu Obodoakor Igwe of Agulu where the new Mother Abbess hails from and the Onowu of Agulu represented by Ichie Nnedu. The new Mother Abbess promised to lead the Abbey according to the monastic rules.

St Scholastica Benedictine Abbey "Peace and Joy" is a daughter house of Benedictine Abbey of St John the Baptist in Rome. It forms part of the great Benedictine family which St Benedict started in the 6th century at Subiaco, Italy. The monastery was built by his Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze in 1978 with 50 acres of land donated by the Umuoji community to the church. It was canonically raised to an Abbey in 1993, with late Rev Mother Patricia Alufuo (OSB) blessed as Abbess on August 21, 1994.

20 NEW PRIESTS FOR OKIGWE DIOCESE

- Bishop cautions clergy on pursuit of money

Okigwe Diocese in September last year increase her missionary pool, when the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Solomon Amatu ordained 20 new priests at the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception, Okigwe, in Imo State. In his homily at the impressive ceremony, at which families of the newly ordained exuded joy and happiness, in gratitude to God; Bishop Amatu stressed the spirituality of life for the priesthood vocation. He therefore used the occasion to admonish the priests, especially the newly ordained to shun all forms of distractions and focus on their priestly vocation.

Noting that the Catholic Priesthood is not and cannot be a vocation for amassing wealth, Bishop Amatu stressed that anybody who embraces the priesthood with the notion of getting rich or amassing wealth is the wrong place and can never succeed. According to him, the quest for money being insatiable, would always lead such a priest further away from Christ, his role model. Bishop Amatu lashed out at priests who organize Adoration programmes with the intent of

financial gains. He urged priests not to disappoint Christ who chose them on one single criterium; "To love him more than all other things".

The Bishop enjoined the newly ordained priests to respect and obey their parish priests and resist the temptation of assuming equality with them on erroneous impression that all ordained priests are equal. Over 200 hundred priests from various dioceses concelebrated the Mass.



Bishop Mamza visits site of IDPs housing estate

The Catholic Bishop of Yola Diocese, Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza has expressed satisfaction with the pace of work on the construction of eighty six units housing estate for the Internally Displaced Person's at Sangere Margi in Gerie Local Government Area. Bishop Dami Mamza expressed his satisfaction when he visited the construction site of the project, recently.

The Bishop explained that so far twenty housing units have been built out of the eighty-six units adding that the project has created job opportunity to the community as ninety percent of the workforce are from the area. He disclosed that plans are underway to build school for the children of the internally displaced persons. Bishop Dami Mamza appreciated Missio of Germany and the Catholic Diocese of Yola for their support and called on individuals, organizations to assist the IDP's. In his remark, the site Engineer Christian Ileagu thanked people of the area for their support and cooperation.



Bishop Dami Mamza at the site of the project.

51 Graduate from School of the Faith in Benin City



Archbishop Augustine Akubeze (5th from left) in a group photograph with some of the graduands and their President, Very Rev Fr. Andrew Ovienloba (3rd from left).

The School of Faith and Leadership of the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City, a Vatican accredited institute recently held its convocation with no fewer than 51 graduands obtaining various academic awards. Earlier in his homily at the celebration of the Mass, His Grace Most Rev. (Dr.) Augustine Obiora Akubeze, the Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Benin City commended the graduands

for attaining a sound faith with doctrinally educated Spirit, rich in ground Christian wisdom to self and the world.

He tasked the graduating students to be more committed and be good ambassadors of the School of Faith and Leadership by participating in all church activities in all the Catholic Churches they find themselves.

He also enjoined them to be exemplary in their characters not only in the churches, but in their places of work to boost the morale or ego of their alma-mater.

Earlier, the President of the Institute, Very Rev Fr. Andrew Ovienloba, expressed gratitude to the Archbishop for establishing the School. He praised the graduands for their determination and doggedness to undergo the training in spite of their age and social status.

He advised them not see themselves as ordained people but educators who are well equipped in their subject areas to complement the efforts of the clergymen in

the Catholic Church.

The Archbishop was assisted at the celebration of the Mass at St. Paul's Catholic Church; by Very Rev. Fr.(Dr.) Andrew Ovienloba, Very Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Benedict Etafo, Rev. Fr. John Adesotu, Rev. Fr. Augustine Eleke and Rev. Fr. Jude Orah.



**“My presence will go with you,
and I will give you rest.”**

Exodus 33:14:

Bishop Ezeokafor at Archbishop Ibezim's Thanksgiving Mass

Story by Abuchi Onwumelu

In the spirit of Ecumenism, the Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese, Most Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor and the representative of the Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha, His Grace Most Rev. Valerian Okeke, Monsignor Gregory Adibe; were at the Thanksgiving Service organized in honour of Archbishop Alexander Ibezim of the Anglican Ecclesiastical Province of the Niger, held at the Cathedral Church of St. Faith, Awka. The thanksgiving service was presided over by the Dean, Church of Nigeria and Bishop of Wusasa Diocese, Archbishop of Kaduna Province, Most Reverend Dr Ali Buba Lamido,

In his sermon at the thanksgiving service, the Dean Church of Nigeria and Archbishop Of Kaduna Province, Most Reverend Dr Ali Buba Lamido, said the Church of God desired peace and togetherness. He noted that if the leadership worked as a team, success would be achieved. He also used the occasion to warn against back biting, quarrels and argument. He



Bishop Paulinus Ezeokafor and Msgr. Adibe at the thanksgiving Service.

appealed to Most Reverend Ibezim to work with the people of his Province; be focused, dedicated and hardworking, stating that persecution would come but that God who called him would equip his Ministry and bless him the more.

Speaking shortly after the service, Bishop Ezeokafor thanked God for the new Archbishop, stating that it was a special call and big responsibility towards the salvation of souls.



The leaders of the Laity Groups presenting gifts to the Bishop.

Bishops identify injustice as cause of unrest in Nigeria

Catholic Bishops in the north have identified injustice perpetrated by political leaders as a major cause of unrest and crisis in the country. The bishops therefore called on government to work towards the promotion of peace and unity among the citizens, irrespective of their religion, ethnic or social status differences.

This assertion was made by the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kaduna Archdiocese, Most Rev. Matthew Ndagoso while speaking on behalf of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province, during the celebration of the Mass, when they paid a commiseration visit to the victims of the Kajuru crisis in Southern Kaduna. The other Bishops who visited the victims and celebrated Mass with them, along with the Archbishop were: Bishops Martin Uzoukwu of Minna; George Dodo of Zaria; John Niyiring of Kano, Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese and the former Administrator of Kafanchan Diocese.

... HOSTS DIOCESAN LAITY COUNCIL

Members of the Awka Diocese Laity Council presenting gifts to the Bishop, Most Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor, during the 2019 Christmas Get-together, the Bishop organized for the leadership of the faithful of the Church in the diocese. The joyous event, which was held at St Patrick's Cathedral Podium, Awka, Anambra State, featured exchange of gifts between the Bishop and leadership of the various societies in the diocese. Speaking on the occasion, the Auxiliary Bishop of Awka Diocese, Most Rev Jonas Benson Okoye, on behalf of the diocesan Bishop, Most Rev Paulinus Ezeokafor, thanked all the societies for their support for the Church and the various gifts brought for the Bishop.

Archbishop Ndagoso who spoke on the promotion of injustice in governance by political leaders, described it as an ailment that had robbed the nation of the peace and unity required in advancing the development and growth of Nigeria. He urged the Federal Government to also ensure political and socio-economic stability in the country.

The Archbishop said: "We all know the story of Kajuru Local Government crises, especially within the last year. we knew what happened. If there are problems between farmers and herders, it is not for us as religious leaders to take side. Ours is to say the truth and ensure justice is done to everybody. And we all know that we are where we are in this country today, because of inequality, simply because people are treated differently in terms of the provisions of infrastructural facilities. "And so, where there are disparities and people are treated unequally, there are bound to be problems. So, this is where we stand as religious and Catholic leaders. Our own is to give hope and also strengthen the people."

The bishops made a donation of N2.5 million to the victims of the Kajuru crisis. They also visited the Fulani communities in the area and urged leaders to join hands with their Christian neighbours to promote peace and the development of the state. They also supported the Fulani communities in the area with financial assistance.

ARCHBISHOP OKEKE LAYS FOUNDATION STONE OF SHANAHAN UNIVERSITY



Archbishop Valerian Okeke laying the foundation stone of the Shanahan University

The proposed Shanahan University, Onitsha, Nigeria, recently took a big leap into reality as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Onitsha, Most Rev Valerian Maduka Okeke laid the foundation stone of the institution with support from the government and prominent faithful and institutions of the Church in the country. The event took place at the University's main campus site, Onitsha. While performing the ceremony, Archbishop Okeke expressed gratitude to God for the grace of building a university in honour of His servant and Bishop Ignatius Joseph Shanahan.

Prior to the foundation stone laying ceremony, the Chairman, Shanahan University Construction Project, Very Rev Fr Basil Ekwunife disclosed that, High Chief Dr. Obiora Okonkwo will lay foundation stone and sponsor the university chapel while Chief (Sir) Mike Anyakwo an Onitsha indigenous business mogul will sponsor a hostel project. The Oluchukwu Microfinance Bank, Onitsha according to Fr Ekwunife will take up the university auditorium project while the Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Archdiocese of Onitsha led by Dame Ngozi Nwanosike will sponsor a hostel project.

The Billion Naira university will run a multi campus system with the main campus in Onitsha and others at Ojoto town and other locations. The foundation stone laying event was part of the activities to mark the 18th Episcopal ordination anniversary of Archbishop Valerian Okeke.

Story by Ononye VC

Archbishop Martins hosts dignitaries at St Augustine University's first Convocation ceremony

St. Augustine University owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos and built in Ilara, Lagos State, had the first convocation of its 32 pioneer student on October 24, 2019 since the institution was established in 2015. The programme was attended by dignitaries from all walks of life. In his address at the convocation ceremony, the Proprietor and Visitor to the university; Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins called on the pioneer graduates to go into the world and impact positively on the society, following their holistic formation in the context of Catholic values and virtues.

While thanking the students and their parents for their trust and pioneering the institution declared: "Now that you have got the tools you need to launch into the deep waters of the world and leave your marks on the sand of time, we ask you to go with courage and determination, lock your focus on positive goals and create in you a disposition for hard work." Archbishop Martins reiterated the need to positively harness the gifts and talents of the youths of the country for the emancipation of a greater Nigerian nation.

The Archbishop declared: "We cannot fail to use an opportunity such as this to call attention to the need for the creation of the atmosphere necessary for the blooming of talents and the

positive use of youthful energy for the growth of our country, Nigeria. An atmosphere of insecurity and lack of adequate basic infrastructure cannot be friendly to the young.

Expressing hope for a better future for the university, Archbishop Martins acknowledged all who have contributed to the establishment of the university, especially Anthony Cardinal Okogie "who envisioned the project and set out the path for bringing it to reality". He also commended the staff and students for their belief in their ability to achieve the day's success together, describing the day's ceremony as a testimony of faith in God and the collective collaboration of all involved in the emancipation of the institution and its sustenance since inception in 2015



Some of the pioneer 32 students of the University.

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."
Isaiah 40:8

A Shepherd without Barrier !!!



Bishop Onah on the bike (in Casock) to one of the out station



Bishop Onah being welcomed by the faithful



Bishop Onah in a meeting with faithful of one of the out station

For the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka Diocese, nothing can come between him and his flock nor prevent his reaching out to them with the Good News. Not the distance, not the lack of good roads nor the absence of means comfortable transportation. So, recently, the Bishop rode on the bike to meet his flock in Agu-Amede Ulo and Odenigbo, Eha-Amufu, in Isi Uzo LGA, Enugu State. To keep them alive in Christ with the Word of God. It was the Bishop's Pastoral Visit to the faithful of these remotest parishes of his diocese whose roads are not motorable. He was nicknamed Pastor at a very young age. He became a priest, then, a Professor, rising to be the first black to be the Vice Rector of the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. He was summoned home to be the Bishop of his People, Nsukka Diocese. He returned. He became the true Pastor. He now smells like his Sheep, as Pope Francis advocates. He is Bishop Godfrey Igwebuike Onah, the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka

As part of his apostolic endeavours aimed at coming into personal contact with the priests, lay faithful and the entire Catholic community in different parishes under the various deaneries entrusted to his watch, the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka Diocese, Most Rev. Prof. Godfrey Igwebuike Onah in his tireless manner embarked on a five-day pastoral visit to some parishes in Ikem deanery in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State. Hence, it was indeed a dream come true for the priests, lay faithful and the Catholic communities who could not hide their joy as they warmly welcomed and received the Father Bishop.

At the historic visits which lasted from 22nd to 26th January, 2019 Bishop Onah visited St. Michael's parish, Aguamede Ulo, St. Paul's parish, Ndiagu Aguamede and St. Mary's parish, Odenigbo Eha-Amufu. The Bishop equally took time to visit all the out stations of the three aforementioned parishes. However, Bishop Onah's visits to some of the out stations were very symbolic as most of the roads were not motorable, so, he had to visit these outstations with the priest, riding a motorbike.

At these stations, Bishop Onah's message centred on peace, love and unity amongst the lay faithful and the entire Catholic communities in the area. He admonished them on the need to show love to all as love is paramount in the lives of every Christian. The Bishop equally encouraged the spirit-filled congregation to embrace peace and unity, adding that they are the core qualities, values and insignia of a true Christian. The Bishop equally stressed the importance of education for the young ones at the right time as this will empower them in life.

After series of catechesis on the doctrines of the Church especially the need to replicate the love of God to everyone we encounter in this world; for love is the epicenter of the commandments of God, the Bishop celebrated masses at the parish centres and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to no fewer than a thousand Christians amidst joy and jubilation.

In his homilies at the Confirmation masses, Bishop Onah urged congregation to eschew the spirit of disunity and embrace love and total peace at all times. He challenged those who received the Sacrament of Confirmation to live out what they have received to their neighbors in a manner fitting for Christians and Catholics in Nsukka Diocese. The local ordinary challenged them to be careful with false prophets, adding that some of them are agents of the devil who are working in the name of Jesus even when their powers are from the Satan. He noted that there are others who perform miracles in the name of Jesus but are not interested in what Jesus teaches but rather are interested in enriching their pockets thereby making their victims poorer.

During the historic pastoral visit, the Chief Shepherd also visited the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu where he celebrated mass for the management, students and the entire Catholic community.

In his homily at the College, the prelate who frowned at the poor infrastructural development in the institution urged the management and students to continue to work hard for the betterment of the institution and Nigeria at large. He condemned all forms of examination malpractices and advised the management, lecturers and students to practice hard work and sincerity in their educational endeavours for a better tomorrow. Receptions were held for the Bishop in most of the places he visited and he was also showered with gifts by the faithful. Some cultural groups were also present and their warm displays added glamour to the gatherings. Highlights of the pastoral visits were the Bishop's inspection of Catholic institutions of the parishes, meetings with the parish priests and parish councils and question and answer sessions with the entire lay faithful.

Story and photos by the Social Communications office of the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka.

CAFOD TOWN HALL MEETING IN ZAMAN TARE



Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Abuja and Apostolic Administrator of Jos, saying the opening prayer before the commencement of the Town Hall Meeting.



One of the participants making a contribution at the discussion session.



Cross section of participants at the town hall meeting.



Another participant making his own intervention at the meeting.



Group photograph of the participants at the Town Hall Meeting.

CSN SEMINAR ON NEW EVANGELIZATION IN ABUJA



Most Rev. Donatus Ogun OSA with some other presenters



Group photograph with Priests.



Group of Rapporteur



Bishop Ogun with Sisters



Fr. Odunsi representing Bp. Francis Adesina of Ijebu



Bp. Ogun with Catechists



A cross section of Priests & Religious



General Participants

CSN SEMINAR ON NEW EVANGELIZATION IN ABUJA



Bishop Anagbe, Bp. Ogun and Sr. Modestus.



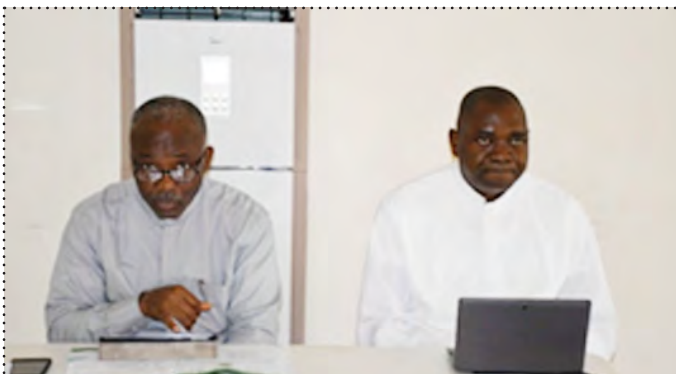
A cross section of Catechists



Rev. Fr. Francis Normakoh presenting his paper



Sr. Bola Ojo SSMA with other participants



Fr. Isaac Dugu (right) and a participant



Rev. Fr. David Ogun S.J Moderating



Fr. Obiyan of Benin City and others listening to presentation



A group of joyous participants

GOVERNMENT/CHURCH COLLABORATION HELPING TO SANITIZE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN GHANA

The cordiality and collaboration between Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana (CBCG) is helping to facilitate the conducive political atmosphere in the country. This understanding resulted in the decision President Nana Akufo-Addo to cancel the planned Political Referendum for December 17, last year, in the country. And as a follow up, the government and the Bishops' Conference are working out modalities on the issue to sustain the continued peaceful and safe political atmosphere in the country. The cancellation of the referendum was at the prompt of the Bishops' Conference after a meeting between the members of the Conference and the Vice President of the country Mahamudu Bawumia. The referendum was aimed at allowing political parties to sponsor candidates. In Ghana, however, these elections are considered non-partisan. But in the president's eyes at the initiative of this reform, "it has long been clear that political parties were, in fact, actively involved in district assembly elections, despite their seemingly non-partisan nature." The moment had come, he felt, "to strip the process of its hypocrisy,

to accept and work with the reality of party participation." At this meeting with the Vice President, Bishop Charles Palmer-Buckle, Vice President of the GCBC, explained that "the current political context was currently poisoned." The Ghanaian bishops had earlier expressed concern about the lack of information on propose important poll. In collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) – a German think tank – the episcopate has strategized to raise awareness and understanding of the stakes of this referendum. In each diocese, they organized explanatory meetings that allowed administrative authorities and civil society actors to discuss its issue.



The Bishops with President Nana Akufo-Addo

Prayer for Christian Unity in Cotonou



Group photograph of Priests and Nuns with the Archbishop, after the ceremony

Catholics and Protestants in Cotonou, in January this year gathered at the Protestant Temple Cité de Paix de Gbégaméy, to pray for peace and the unity of Christian denominations in the country, as part of the activities for the celebration of the Christian unity week in the country. The School of Theological and Pastoral Initiation (Eitp) of the Diocese of Cotonou and the Protestant community Cité de Paix de Gbégaméy, in Cotonou together celebrated the week of prayer for Christian unity. To do this, they organized two ecumenical celebrations.

The first, which was held on Monday January 20, consisted mainly of the recitation of vespers. On this occasion, Pastor Martin Akpo, head of the Protestant community Cité de Paix, who came to the Catholic institution with the faithful of his community, preached.

For the second celebration, the formators and students of the School of Theological and Pastoral Initiation (Eitp) moved to the Protestant Temple of Gbégaméy. This celebration combined praise, liturgy of the word, preaching and intercessions. In his preaching, Father Gbédjinou, director of the Eitp explained that "this ecumenical march is fully integrated into the dynamics of the Eitp which, in two years, has had several ecumenical approaches". "For intellectual activities of the School – symposia, theological debates – Protestant pastors and theologians are associated".

Source: RECOWA OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Archbishops Gomez and Vigneron elected USCCB president and vice president

In November last year, the bishops of the United States of America elected a new president and vice president to lead the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for the next three years. The bishops elected Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles as President and Archbishop Allen Vigneron of Detroit as vice president of the conference.

Gomez, 67, born in Monterrey, Mexico, and ordained a priest of Opus Dei in Spain, is the first Latino to lead the bishops' conference. He is also the first immigrant at the conference helm. Vigneron, a Michigan native, has led the Detroit Archdiocese since 2009. He was ordained a priest for the archdiocese in 1975 and made an auxiliary bishop for Detroit in 1996. In 2003 he was named co-adjutor and later ordinary of the Diocese of Oakland.

One of the more thorny issues facing the newly elected leadership team will be how to deal with bishops, both active and retired, who face accusations of either negligence or abuse of office. In June, last year, the conference adopted a set of protocols on how diocesan bishops could limit the ministry of their retired or removed predecessors in the event that allegations came to light. Among those provisions was the option to "disinvite" emeritus bishops from attending future USCCB meetings.



Archbishop Gomez

President Áder invites Pope Francis to visit Hungary

President Áder of Hungary has invited the Holy Father Pope Francis to visit his country and participate in the forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress scheduled for September 13 – 20, this year. The President

made the disclosure to the media, after he had an audience with the Holy Father.

The Hungarian President noted that this year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Hungary and the Holy See as well as the 30th anniversary of their re-establishment. He noted that Hungary has not had a papal visit since Pope John Paul II visited the country in 1996.



Holy Father Pope Francis with President Áder of Hungary

Áder said Pope Francis's visit to Csíksomlyó (Sumuleu Ciuc), Romania, last year had been a "tremendous success" among Catholics, adding that the pontiff "would surely receive a similarly loving welcome from Hungarian believers". He added that the pope showed keen interest in the programme of the congress.

President Áder confirmed Hungary's invitation during his meeting with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin. The cardinal said after the meeting that it would be an honour for him to accompany the pope on his visit to Budapest.

NEW FORMS OF BONDAGE THAT ENSLAVE THE POOR IDENTIFIED

The Holy Father, Pope Francis has expressed deeper concern on the situation of the widening gap between the rich and the poor of the world noting that the situation has become more contentious with “today’s new forms of bondage that enslave millions of men, women, young people and children”. The Pope’s observation was contained in his third World Day of the Poor message, released by the Vatican, to mark this year’s Day of the Poor, noting that the demeaning disparity has hunted the world for several centuries. Using several passages of the bible and other documents of the Church to emphasize the position of the Church on this contentious issue, which is premised on the fact that hope is not lost for the poor; Pope Francis stated that: “The hope of the poor will not perish forever” (Ps 9:19). He added: “These words of the Psalm express the profound truth that faith impresses above all on the hearts of the poor, restoring lost hope in the face of injustice, sufferings and the uncertainties of life. Pointing out that for centuries, “the inequitable distribution of wealth created a significant number of poor people, whose condition appeared all the more dramatic in comparison with the wealth attained by a privileged few; the Pope stated that the Psalmist gave a vivid picture of this realistic situation.



Pope Francis and the 40-year-old Uruguayan priest, Gonzalo Aemilius

Pope Francis Names Fr. Aemilius New Personal Secretary

The Holy Father, Pope Francis has named Fr. Gonzalo Aemilius, of the clergy in Montevideo, Uruguay, as his personal secretary. This was disclosed by the Director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, on Sunday, January 26, 2020. He replaces Argentinian priest, Msgr. Fabian Pedacchio, who served as Francis’ secretary from 2013 to 2019. He recently returned to working entirely within the Vatican’s Congregation for Bishops. “Father Gonzalo,” Bruni’s statement concluded, “was born on Sept. 18, 1979, ordained a priest on May 6, 2006, and has a doctorate in theology.” The secretary does not come from the Roman Curia, and rather is used to being among the people, working with youth on the street and the marginalized.

POPE MAKES GOV. OBIANO KNIGHT OF ST GREGORY

The Holy Father Pope Francis, recently at the Vatican decorated the Governor of Anambra State, Sir Willie Obiano, in appreciation of his meritorious service to the Church and humanity. The ceremony was witnessed by members of his family, close friends and associated as well as some officials of the Anambra State Government. The Governor was made a Knight Commander of the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great.



Sir Willie Obiano with his wife, Lady Ebechukwu Obiano



The Holy Father Pope Francis congratulating Governor Obiano, after his investiture.



The Holy Father Pope Francis (3rd from right), with members of the immediate family of Sir Willie Obiano.

Importance of Dialogue on Liturgical Music and interpretation stressed



The Holy Father Pope Francis has reiterated the invaluable role of liturgical music, its proper interpretation and the interpreters in the life of the Church, noting that: every Christian is “an interpreter of the will of God” through the singing of praise songs; while the Church through the songs of the faithful “interprets the Gospel as she makes her pilgrim way through history”

The Pope made this remark while addressing the over 200 participants from different parts of the world at the Third International Congress on Church Music, held recently at the Vatican, Rome. The programme was organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture in cooperation with the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music and the Liturgical Institute of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant’Anselmo. The theme of the Congress was: Church Music and Interpreters: A Necessary Dialogue

According to the Holy Father: “The Interpreter of music has much in common with the biblical scholar, with the proclaimer of God’s word, but also with those who seek to interpret the signs of times, and even more generally, with all those – and each of us should be one of them! – who are open and attentive to others in sincere dialogue.”

He continued: “Every Christian in fact, is an interpreter of the will of God in his or her own life, and by his or her life sings a joyful hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. Through that song, the Church interprets the Gospel as she makes her pilgrim way through history. The Blessed Virgin Mary did this in an exemplary way in her Magnificat, while the saints interpret the will of God by their lives and mission.

Appreciating the talent of those engaged in liturgical music interpretation, the Pope stated: “... an interpreter, especially in the field of music necessarily ‘translates’ in a unique and personal way – what the composer has written, in order to create a beautiful and outstanding artistic experience. In effect, a musical work exists only insofar as it is interpreted, and thus only when someone is there to interpret it”

He continued: “A good interpreter feels great humility before a work of art is not his or her property. Recognizing that they put their expertise at the service of the community, such interpreters constantly strive to be transformed, interiorly and professionally, in order to bring out the beauty of the music and, in the context of the liturgy, to serve others through the works they perform.”

Using the Psalms and some document of the Church to buttress his position on the importance of dialogue, the Holy Father described it as a three-way conversation stating: “There is dialogue, because experiencing a work of art is never something static or mathematical. There is conversation between the author, the work and the interpreter.

He added: “The artist, the interpreter and – in the case of music – the listener, all have the same desire: to understand what beauty, music and art allow us to know of God’s grandeur. Now perhaps more than ever, men and women have need of this. Interpreting that reality is essential for today’s world.”

"HOPE IS THE SUSTAINABILITY PILLAR OF GLOBAL PEACE"

The Holy Father, Pope Francis has described hope as the panacea for global peace as it has remained the sustainability pillar of the world in spite of tribulations and seemingly insurmountable obstacles in all corners of the world.

The Pope made this assertion in his 2020 World Day of Peace message, released by the Vatican and titled: Peace as A Journey of Hope: Dialogue, Reconciliation and Ecological Conversion. According to him: “Peace is a great and precious value, the object of our hope and the aspiration of the entire human family”.

While expressing concern about the memories of the scars of global wars and conflicts, particularly as the afflict the poor and the vulnerable, Pope Francis declared: “Entire nations find it difficult to break free of the chains of exploitation and corruption that fuel hatred and violence. Even today, dignity, physical integrity, freedom, including religious freedom, communal solidarity and hope in the future are denied to great numbers of men and women, young and old. He added: “Many are the victims of painful humiliation and exclusion, sorrow and injustice, to say nothing of the trauma born of systematic attacks on their people and their loved ones.”

He added: “The terrible trials of internal and international conflicts, often aggravated by ruthless acts of violence, have an enduring effect on the body and soul of humanity. Every war is a form of fratricide that destroys the human family’s innate vocation to brotherhood.” He continued: “Every threatening situation feed mistrust and lead people to withdraw into their own safety zone. Mistrust and fear weaken, relationships and increase the risk of violence, creating a vicious circle that can never lead to a relationship of peace.”

He continued: “We cannot claim to maintain stability in the world through the fear of annihilation, in a volatile situation, suspended on the brink of a nuclear abyss and enclosed behind walls of indifference”. These situations the Holy Father contended have led to social and economic decisions that have resulted in “tragic situations where human beings and creation itself are discarded rather than protected and preserved”

Pope Francis also described peace as a journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity; peace, a journey of reconciliation in fraternal communion and peace as a journey of ecological conversion.

CSN 2019 MARANATHA PRAISE SONGS CELEBRATION



Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomwhange, Fr. Emmanuel Ating, the Chief Celebrant and Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, CSN Secretary General at the opening Mass



Chuks De General one of the Masters of Ceremony at the programme



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze and Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Abuja at the programme



Hon. Minister of Transportation, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi making a speech on behalf of Vice President Yemi Osinbajo at the programme



CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi and Chief (Mrs) Helen Mark at the programme.



Gospel Singer, Chioma Jesus performing during the programme



Cross section of of the faithful at the celebration.



Part of the mammoth crowd at the celebration.

CSN 2019 MARANATHA PRAISE SONGS CELEBRATION



Minister of Transportation, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi (Center) discussing with another guest at the programme. First left is his wife.



Chris Morgan performing at the programme.



Lady Theodore Innih and another guest at the programme



A member of the congregation in a prayerful mood.



CSN Director of Pastoral Agents, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu (left) with Sir. Jude Nnam.



John Bernard thrilling the audience .



Cross section of the people at the programme praying



PMS National Director, Rev. Fr. George Ajana and some Religious dancing during the celebration.

CSN Maranatha Night of Songs and Praise

- Nigeria Wallowing in Darkness says CBCN President
- 7000 people from all walks of life in attendance
- 10 Gospel Singers and Church Choir entertained

December... 2019 will remain an indelible day in the annals of the history of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, as the Night of Songs and Praise to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in the premises of the Secretariat was a glowing success. With about 12 Gospel Singers and choir of different Christian denominations; and a crowd of over 7,000 people from different walks of life; it was indeed a glorious day of reaching out to the heavens with prayer songs and praise. The programme which started with the celebration of Mass at about 7pm in the evening ended with a closing Mass at 6 am, the following morning.



In attendance were: the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze and the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama. Also in attendance were the Minister of Transport, Honourable Rotimi Amaechi who represented the Special Guest of honour, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo; , Mrs. Pauline Tallen, Minister of Women Affairs; Sir Obiora Okonkwo, the donour of the St Gabriel Catholic Chaplaincy Church; Chief Mrs. Helen Mark, wife of the former Senate President; Lady Thodore Inih, Rev. Frs. Religious of different Congregations, and people from all walks of life including non-Christians. The highlight of the celebration also included the sharing of bags of Rice and other food items for the people present at the ceremony.

Speaking at the ceremony, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria and Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze expressed concern that the Nigerian nation is wallowing in the darkness of several challenges and these are hindering the spiritual and pastoral growth of the people as well as the socio-economic development of the country.

According to the CBCN President: "In our land, so many people, both the political leaders, and the people are walking in darkness. We walk in the darkness of electoral malpractices; examination malpractices; budget padding; emblems of public funds; selective persecution of people; corruption in both private and public sectors." He continued: "Yes, even in the religious places, some leaders manipulate the people with the gospel of prosperity in an economy that is not growing. The people are asked to sow seed of faith with money and the seeds seem to be growing only in the lives of the preachers who are acquiring more expensive and luxurious cars and private jets."

He added: "Many of our youths are walking in the darkness

of addiction to drugs, addiction to pornography; addiction to ambition without means to achieve it. Many of them are walking in darkness in foreign lands with shattered dreams and visions and are too ashamed to come back home." The local ordinary of Benin City Archdiocese used several passages in the Bible to buttress his assertion.

Archbishop Akubeze also advocated that the Year 2020 should be one of justice, equity and love in Nigeria devoid of vices that are making life unbearable for the majority of Nigerians, in spite of the country being blessed with natural and human resources. The CBCN President continued: "Material acquisition without reference to the author of the material leads to interior darkness. Interior darkness of the soul leads to the disorder use of material wealth. There is darkness in any society that does not share its wealth well. A greater number of people in Nigeria are poor because of the greed of a few. God has blessed our land with enough resources to care for all every Nigerian". Using the opportunity to educate the people on the birth of Christ as the light of salvation that has illumined the world and delivered humanity from the power of tyranny and darkness as implied in King Herod; Archbishop Akubeze declared: "... we can see that in spite of the evil of human beings, God can bring his prophecy to fulfilment. The men and women who live in darkness have come to see a great Light. Christ is the Light that burns away evil. The evil in the hearts of some Nigerians would be burnt through the Light of Christ."

While commending the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria for the laudable objectives of organizing the Maranatha Praise programme; which was intended to make Christianity more visible, foster ecumenical relations, rekindle hope in a better Nigeria and reach out to the poor through charity; Archbishop Akubeze emphasized that "The Church is a sacrament that mediate Christ to the world.

CSN 2019 MARANATHA PRAISE SONGS CELEBRATION



CCFN Executive Secretary, Rev. Fr. Uche Obodoechina (right) and National Catholic Service Centre Director, Rev. Fr. Joseph Offor at the programme



Frank Edwards performing at the programme



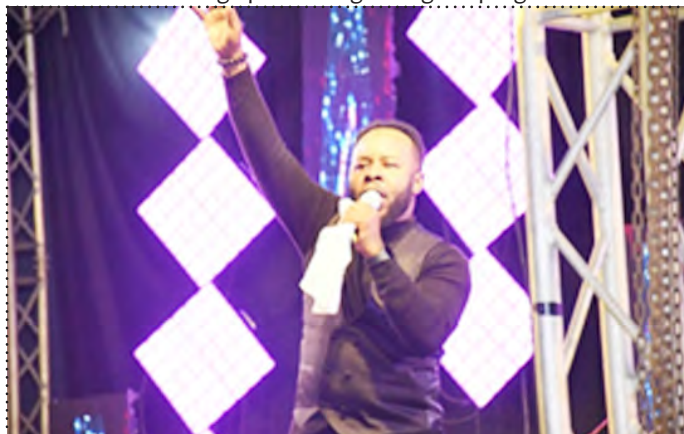
Chioma Jesus during her performance at the programme



Genevieve Ogu performing during the programme



Mercy Chinwo performing during the programme



Prosper Ochimana performing



Buchi entertaining the guests

FIRST 2020 CBCN PLENARY OPENING CEREMONY IN PICTURES



The Bishops in a procession into the Church for the opening Mass.



The Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama delivering the homily at the opening Mass.



CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze (centre), presiding at the opening Mass. Extreme left is the CBCN Vice President, Bishop Lucius Ugorji of Umuahia.



Vice President Yemi Oshinbajo (left) and Transportation Minister, Honourable Rotimi Amaechi at the opening Mass.



Cross section of the Bishops at the opening Mass. Front row L-R: John Cardinal Onaiyekan, emeritus of Abuja; Archbishop Valerian Okeke of Onitsha and the Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi.



Cross section of members of Religious Congregations at the opening Mass.



Member the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) at the opening Mass.



Cross section of Knights of the Church at the opening Mass.

FIRST 2020 CBCN PLENARY OPENING CEREMONY IN PICTURES



L-R: The opening ceremony Chairman Professor Epiphany Azinge, SAN, OON, KSJJ; CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze; Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Filipazzi, CBCN Vice President, Bishop Lucius Ugorji of Umuahia.



Cross section of the Bishops at the opening ceremony.



Members of the High Table and other guests standing during the prayer for the opening ceremony.



Some of the Bishops and other guests at the opening ceremony.



Cross section of the lay faithful at the opening ceremony.



Bishop Michael Apochi of Otukpo and other guests at the opening ceremony.



4th from left: Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi, Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Minister of Transportation, Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi and wife after the opening Mass.