

CSN NEWS

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Synod on Synodality: Areas of concern for the church in Nigeria



Cardinal Onaiyekan at 80:
CBCN lauds Prelate's
diligence, simplicity

Katsina Diocese:
'Become another
voice to denounce
the mindless, reckless
spilling of blood in the
North', Homilist
charges new Bishop



**African Bishops
adopt Nigerian
ComWeek initiative**





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The Word of God is Alive!

Dear friends,



**Very Rev. Fr.
Michael
Nsikak
Umoh
Editor-in-Chief**

EDITOR'S NOTE

I have the privilege of introducing to you another information-packed edition of your number one authoritative magazine on the Catholic Church and Bishops in Nigeria. Following the decision of the Catholic Bishops to contextualise the ongoing conversation on the Synod on Synodality to the Nigerian situation, we serve you with Rev. Prof. Anthony Akinwale's short piece who posits that an authentic synodal path, is an authentic ecumenical path and vice versa. The erudite scholar and theologian emphasised that merely walking together does not make us synodal, unless we walk in the steps of Jesus. Bishop of four ecclesiastical provinces, Owerri, Jos, Ibadan and Lagos, have expressed their minds on numerous issues bothering the church and the nation in their informative, didactic and prophetic communiques. These we have delightfully rendered in this edition as a fair representation of the position of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria on various issues. "Fiducia Supplicans" is one Vatican document that drew the attention of the world to the Catholic Church and set the internet on fire. The Bishops of Africa had their say too. You can read the high point of 10 African Episcopal Conferences here. In an interesting development, this edition brings to you details of the historic hosting of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria in November 2023, for the landmark 50th anniversary of the Pan African Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS) in Lagos. Our own President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, in his Address to his counterpart across the African continent and Madagascar, seized the opportunity to export the Nigeria Communications Week initiative to the African bishops. Also, the the Prefect, Dicastery for Communication of the Holy See, Dr Paolo Ruffini who was present at the gathering of the African Church communicators, challenged the bishops to invent new ways of peer-to-peer communication that is based on communion instead of division.

As you will expect, the edition showcases the significant growth and development recorded by the Nigerian Church since after the last conference in September 2023; the creation of a new Diocese of Katsina, the ordination of 4 new bishops for the newly created Diocese of Katsina, and the dioceses of Zaria and Ilorin, and an Auxiliary Bishop to the Apostolic Administrator of Ahiara Diocese and the appointment of a new Auxiliary Bishop for Orlu Diocese. Furthermore, we did not deny you the beautiful news of one our foremost ecclesiastic in Nigeria; the highly revered and accomplished John Cardinal Onaiyekan, who celebrated his 80th birthday. A celebration that started in Rome with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and was concluded with a grand celebration in Abuja. We equally brought to you report from our young prince of the Church, Peter Cardinal Okpaleke, taking over his Church, the Martyrs of Uganda, Church in Rome.


What more do we need say? Relax and enjoy this great presentation, brought to you by the hardworking team of the media office of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. Thank you!

*Very Rev. Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh
Editor-in-Chief*

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**Very Rev.
Fr. Zacharia
Nyantiso
Samjumi**

**FROM THE SECRETARY
GENERAL'S DESK**

Reflecting on Synod on Synodality



(Exert from an address to the press by Fr. Zacharia Samjumi)

Synodality is a term that is old and yet new in the vocabulary of the Church. The etymology is Greek. Two words are joined: syn and hodos, meaning together on the road. In other words, walking together. Therefore, the term is used by the Church to describe the process of fraternal collaboration and discernment. It denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Catholic Church, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly, and take an active part in her evangelising mission irrespective of the diversities in tribal affiliations, regional associations, political ideologies or even thought factions.

The Focus of the Synodality

As we know, Christianity has come a long way, encountering different times and seasons in its history. At our time, the Church pauses to re-read and rethink what she holds and expresses as communion, participation, and mission. In other words, how do we, as a Church, express communion? What does participation mean for us? How best can we achieve the mission of the Church? The saying goes: "If you want to run fast, run alone. If you want to run Far, run together." Synodality calls for walking together so that what we hold as communion and our participation in the mission of the Church will endure. Re-reading and rethinking is not disbelieving or discarding our heritage but finding how best to keep our heritage alive and active. Times have changed and will continue to change. Therefore, revitalising our long-held values of communion, participation, and mission will entail telling our stories as communities and individuals. This also calls for patient listening groups and persons.

Telling Our Stories – Finding Pathways

Whether bitter or sweet, history is an asset for people and individuals. History is an embodiment of experiences. Throwing them away means we are likely to repeat the same. When people tell their stories, their experiences become beacons, warning them not to go the same way again. Experiences are shared with others so that new pathways can be fashioned for a better experience. The Catholic Bishops extend this synodal sentiment to the Christian community to look inward, share our stories, and actively listen to one another if we want to walk far as communities participating in the mission of the Church. Communities need to recognise and appreciate the diverse socio-cultural makeup of the various Christian communities. We need to draw strength from the early Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles 6:1. The Hellenistic Jews told their story about the food being distributed. They were overlooked in the daily distribution of the food. The Apostles listened to the story and found a pathway for the distribution of food, which benefits the Church up to date.

Synodality, Way Forward for the Church and State

The Church has already started this inward journey of re-reading and rethinking communion, participation, and mission. The process commenced on 9 October 2021 and will continue till 2024 in listening and dialoguing. It started with parish communities all over the world to dioceses, national, continental, and Universal levels. So far, irregular communions are the bane of the Church's mission. Dialogue is ongoing to find pathways to the various irregular unions among church members. The Church acknowledges that it is not enough to be judges who only deny, reject and exclude others. We must also find ways to mirror God's love for sinners such that it would open them up to His grace and mercy.

In the same vein, the process of synodality is possible for our country, Nigeria. We must re-read and rethink our sense of nationhood. The stories are clear to almost everyone in the country. We are not one! There are obvious ethnic, religious, regional, and north and south barriers. Many people are pigeonholed into either Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba and yet they do not feel belonging to any. The nation must listen to those stories. There are palpable feelings of marginalisation. We need to listen to how it feels to be marginalised. What colonial mentalities have not been thrown away? What religious mentality have we inherited and are still clinging to? There are different agendas and mentalities for Northerners and Southerners. The government must prioritise our walking together despite our individual and cultural peculiarities to achieve our goal of being one indivisible nation where everyone will long to belong. Synodality is proposed as a process for us to dialogue in sincerity of heart for the promotion of the dignity of the human person and the development of our country.



Rev. Fr.
Professor
Anthony
Akinwale, OP



“Our journey is authentically synodal and authentically ecumenical if and when we walk together behind Jesus, not walking behind the world. On this journey undertaken together, we must differentiate between what is compatible with the Gospel and what is not even if it will make us unpopular as a Church”

(Rev. Fr. Professor Anthony Akinwale, OP was unanimously appointed by the CBCN to be the support theologian for the Nigerian delegation to the Synod on Synodality in Rome from where he writes these reflections).

Synodality and Ecumenism

In our quest to be a more synodal Church, it is necessary but insufficient to journey together. We must differentiate between what is authentic about our journey and what is inauthentic.

An authentically synodal path is an authentically ecumenical path, and an authentically ecumenical

path is an authentically synodal path. An authentically ecumenical path is a journey undertaken together towards a common comprehension of apostolic tradition. Merely walking together does not make us synodal. For we may be walking together in the wrong direction.

Our guide must be the Gospel of

COVER



Christ, the Gospel that Christ is, a Gospel which may be rejected today. The Gospel as handed down to us through the ages is the pillar of fire guiding us through the dark. Without the Gospel we walk into perdition even if we are walking together.

Our journey is authentically synodal and authentically ecumenical if and when we walk together behind Jesus, not walking behind the world. The journey of authentic discipleship will, from time to time, compel us to make choices that are not politically correct, choices and pastoral dispositions that will make some think we are exclusive in our way of life. On this journey undertaken together, we must differentiate between what is compatible with the Gospel and what is not even if it will make us unpopular as a Church.

The synodal path is the path of Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Following his way together, having the audacity to say yes to him even if it means saying no to the world is the way of authentic synodality.

The ecumenical path is not a path to political consensus. For it is quite possible to build a consensus around values that are contrary to the Gospel handed down to us from the apostle.

It is another thing to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We cannot embark on the journey expected of us by the Lord if we have opted, even before the journey begins, for an undifferentiated acceptance

of the values and behavior of the world. Travelers are brave. The Church of our time must have the bravery to be different even if it is unpopular to do so.

The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Niceae is an opportunity to interrogate ourselves as a Church whether or not we give the faith of Niceae its dues. It is an opportunity to dialogue with all Churches and ecclesial communities on the teachings and implications of Niceae for our time; an opportunity to inquire if we journey by listening to tradition or if, journeying together, we have strayed together. Have we been listening to the Holy Spirit or to the spirit of the age together? Which spirit is guiding us on this journey: the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the age?

The imperative of ecumenism is the imperative of listening to tradition together. This teaches us that our synodality is not to be reduced to listening to one another. Synodality is a journey with Jesus that obliges us to listen to the word of God, not just the word of contemporary culture.

The two disciples on the way to Emmaus were journeying together but in the wrong direction. They listened to each other as they journeyed together. Yet, they were confused until they listened to Jesus. They were able to retrace their steps because they listened to Jesus together instead of just listening to each other together. They listened to him together before they could recognize him at the breaking of bread.

CEPACS: An Address presented by the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, at the 50th Anniversary and Conference of the Pan-African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications, held at the Lumen Christi Retreat & Media Centre, Lekki in Lagos Archdiocese on Monday 20 November, 2023.



“In view of the above, it is easy to see how the digital media impacts our mission as a church, necessitating that we adhere more faithfully to the age long clarion calls by the Church to embrace the media with all seriousness since the Church cannot exist without communicating”



Local Organising Committee, headed by Sir Soji Olagunju.

This indeed is a historic gathering for our Church in Africa, as we celebrate the fruits of the seed that was sowed here in Nigeria, at the Pan-African Episcopal Meeting on Social Communications held in Ibadan, Nigeria from November 28 – December 2, 1973. That was a long time considering the enormous developments that have occurred in the area of media and communications and in the Church. Since then, as it is said, a lot of water has passed under the bridge in a bid to realise the objective for which CEPACS was set up. Much as one would sincerely agree that the journey has not been very rosy, it is necessary to reaffirm that the vision for CEPACS remains laudable.

We are all witnesses to the rapid growth and development the world has experienced in the area of media and communication technology in the past decades, and how these have deeply influenced the totality of human culture. We are now in the age of the revolutionary digital media with very encompassing impacts on human culture which are both positive and negative. Some of the positive impacts include, enhancing social connections, increasing access to information, as well as fostering creativity and innovation; while some of the negative impacts are reducing face-to-face interaction, spreading misinformation, and creating digital divides.

In view of the above, it is easy to see how the digital media impacts our mission as a church, necessitating that we adhere more faithfully to the age long clarion calls by the Church to embrace the media with all seriousness since the Church cannot exist without communicating. We are pleased to note that the Holy Father has already chosen for our reflection in the 2024 World Communication Day (WCD), the theme that touches on the highly controversial

On behalf of all the Catholic bishops in Nigeria, I am delighted to make this presentation on this auspicious occasion of the 50th anniversary and Conference of the Comité Episcopal Panafricain Pour les Communications Sociales (CEPACS), which in English translates as, the Pan-African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications, holding on this day, 20 November, 2023, here in Lagos.

I thank the Almighty Father for making this gathering possible and for bringing everyone here safe, from very far and near. We pray for this same grace when we all shall return to our base at the end of this programme.

Our gratitude also goes specially to our amiable host, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Lagos, for opening his arms so widely to welcome us to his Archdiocese, and for all his accompanying support of this august event in many ways we cannot quantify. We thank you, Your Grace, the clergy, religious the distinguished lay faithful of this great Archdiocese, and the hardworking

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. This will afford us the opportunity to participate, before it is too late, in contributing to the development of this life changing technology; particularly as it affects us in Africa.

On that note, we add our voice in thanking all those who have in the past five decades piloted the affairs of CEPACS, while expressly appreciating the efforts and commitment of our current President, Most Rev. Emmanuel Badejo, in repositioning the body since when he took over leadership in 2016, after the 12-year dormancy. Today we can attest to a CEPACS that is striving to live up to the vision of its founding fathers; that of coordinating all matters concerning the Catholic Church's activities in the realm of media in Africa and Madagascar – print, electronic and the digital media. We note with joy the connection established with the APO media network through the ingenuity of the President and the regular meetings among the media practitioners in the continent under the aegis of SIGNIS.

To conclude this address, permit me highlight two matters for our consideration at this Conference:

COMWEEK programme: We officially introduce the Communications Week (ComWEEK) programme to CEPACS, as an initiative of our conference of bishops in Nigeria. ComWEEK is an expansion of the annual one-day World Communication Day (WCD) celebration into a one week fully coordinated media literacy programme based on the theme of the WCD given by the Holy Father for the year. It

is organised and coordinated by our National Directorate of Social Communications for all the over 4,300 parishes in Nigeria. So far, it has successfully run for two years, and the result has been very encouraging. We wish to propose this initiative to the conferences of SECAM through CEPACS, and will be glad to share our experience with any Conference that may be interested.

As a way of sustaining the momentum of the decisions taken by CEPACS, we propose that bringing the National Directors of Communications in all our different conferences together as a body will be very helpful. A periodic meeting, convoked by CEPACS, to this effect will go a long way towards consolidating and implementing our decisions at the grassroots.

Finally, I would like to congratulate CEPACS on its 50th anniversary and wish us a very fruitful Conference as we reflect on the theme: "CEPACS at 50: Towards promoting a synodal Church in Africa through social communications".

May the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Word, and of St. Francis de Sales, the patron of journalists, help us to accomplish this noble task. Amen.

Thank you and God bless you all.

Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji
Archbishop of Owerri Archdiocese
President, CBCN

CIWA matriculates new students

By Fr. Chijioke Azuawusiefe, SJ & Sr. Patricia Daaor, OP

The Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt, recently matriculated new students on its Obehie campus in Abia State for the 2023/2024 academic session. The event, which also commemorated the feast day of one of the Institute's patron saints, St. Thomas Aquinas (January 28), started with a Holy Mass presided over by the Rector, Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Jude Abidemi Asanbe.

In his welcome address to the matriculants, the Rector articulated the objectives for which CIWA was founded, namely "to train personnel for the Church in West Africa and to assist the growth of the faith and the development of Christian maturity." CIWA does this, the Rector added, "by the study of theology and allied sciences through the prism of inculturation and contextualisation."

The matriculation ceremony followed the Holy Mass, as the new undergraduate and postgraduate students processed into the chapel, adorned in their respective faculty's matriculation gowns.

The Head of the Department of Pastoral Theology, Rev. Fr. Dr. Samuel Gwimi, delivered a lecture titled, "The Significance of Pastoral Ministry in the Development of St. Augustine's Theological Achievements: Implications for Studies in CIWA." Acknowledging St. Augustine, CIWA's co-patron saint, as "one of the greatest Christian theologians in all Church history," Fr. Dr. Gwimi noted that Augustine's pastoral ministry informed his numerous theological works. "This has lots of implications for theological studies in CIWA," he said. "For theological studies in CIWA to be relevant, they must address pastoral issues, as theological research must be contextual, addressing existential problems."

CIWA Registrar Rev. Fr. Dr. Patrick Okuta led the new



students afterwards through their declaration of loyalty to the Institute. They promised to be of good behavior and to keep the Institute's rules and regulations. Then, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Rev. Fr. Prof. Luke Ijezie, presented the matriculants to the Rector, Fr. Prof. Asanbe, who formally received them into the Institute.



KATSINA DIOCESE: 'Become another voice to denounce the mindless, reckless spilling of blood in the North', Homilist charges new Bishop

By Rev. Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh

The Catholic Bishop of Aba Diocese, Most Rev. Augustine Echema, charged the new Bishop of the new Catholic Diocese of Katsina, Most Rev. Gerald Mamman Musa to see himself as another voice that has come to denounce the mindless and reckless spilling of blood in the Northern part of Nigeria and other parts of the country.

"Like your brothers, Most Rev. Mathew Ndagoso of Kaduna Archdiocese and Most Rev. Mathew Kukah of Sokoto Diocese, you will become another voice to denounce the mindless and reckless spilling of blood here in the North and other part of the country. You must continue to tell the criminals and all those involved, that the shedding of innocent blood is wrong.

"You are being empowered today, to speak up in the face of injustice, to join other bishops in Nigeria to become the voice of the voiceless and to cater for the many displaced families and refugees in your homeland."

Bishop Echema gave the charge in his homily during the Mass for the canonical erection of the new Diocese of Katsina and the Episcopal ordination and installation of Bishop Musa as its first Bishop, on Tuesday, December 12, 2023 at the open field of St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church in Kaduna. He urged the new Bishop to pay careful attention the socio-political happenings in the country, rather than remain indifferent about the plight of the suffering masses.

"As a Chief Shepherd and Pastor, you are to give constant attention to the socio-political happenings in our nation. We as pastors cannot sit on the fence and turn our back on the oppressed and the suffering masses, we are to intercede and advocate for the oppressed, weak and the marginalized in our society."

Praying for God's blessings and protection on the new Bishop

and the new Diocese, the homilist reminded Bishop Musa that the mission of Christ to all pastors and shepherds of the flock of Christ, is to announce the goodnews of Christ, comfort the afflicted and proclaim liberty to the captives especially in Nigeria.

"As we consecrate you today, I humbly implore God to strengthen you, and bless you with an ever burning zeal and undaunted courage through the intercession and maternal care and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and the apostles whom you have become one of their successors.

"His mission is very clear, to heal to the afflicted in Nigeria, comfort those who mourn and to announce the goodness of Christ. To liberate those in prison. Liberty for our people held in captivity by boko haram, herdsmen, kidnappers and to bring succour to our teeming youths, who are wallowing aimlessly without a future."

The Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan who was the Chief celebrant and Principal Consecrator at the Mass, presided over the canonical rite of the Episcopal ordination and diocesan erection. He equally, carried out an official handover of relevant documents and administrative tools to the new bishop of the new Diocese of Katsina which was carved out of the Diocese of Sokoto.

The celebration had 26 bishops in attendance, numerous priests, religious and heads of the various lay apostolate groups in the church. It also enjoyed the presence of the Executive Governor of Katsina State, Dikko Umar Radda who was represented by some members of the State Executive Council, as well as traditional Rulers, religious leaders, amongst others.



Let justice and equity thrive

A Communiqué issued by the Catholic Bishops of the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province, meeting at Villa Assumpta, Owerri, 16 – 17 January 2024

Preamble

We, the Catholic Bishops of the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province, met at Villa Assumpta, Owerri, from the 16 –17 January, 2024. Having prayerfully deliberated on several matters of great concern to our people, we issue the following Communiqué:

1. Embracing the New Year with Hope and Gratitude

The year 2023 had been rough and tough for our nation, our society and the Church. The Naira scarcity, the removal of the subsidy on Petroleum Products, and

the steady decline of the value of the Naira, raised further the already high cost of living, and thus created dismay and panic among our people. In addition the political and legal wranglings in the aftermath of the General Elections of 2023, the widespread emigration of our highly trained professionals in various fields, the menace of false prophets and claims of unfounded miracles, have continued to demoralize our citizens – Christians and others. And so, as the New Year dawned, Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief for the departure of the year 2023. Echoes of joy and relief were heard everywhere as the clock ushered in the year 2024: through various towns and villages



COMMUNIQUE

OWERRI ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE

all types of celebrations were going on, ranging from carnivals, family celebrations, community festivals, etc. The hope was that things will be better for everyone in the country in the year 2024.

There are genuine reasons for gratitude to God in the Church. Since our last meeting, our Ecclesiastical Province has been blessed with the appointment of two Auxiliary Bishops. We congratulate Most Rev. Simeon Okezuo Nwobi CMF, who was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Ahiara Diocese on 14 October, 2023 and consecrated on 19 December, 2023. We wish him a fruitful Episcopal ministry. We felicitate with Msgr. Thomas Obiatuegwu on his appointment as the Auxiliary Bishop of Orlu on 5 January, 2024. We look forward to his Episcopal Ordination on Wednesday, 20 March, 2024.

We wish to express our gratitude to God for the peace that seems to be returning to our states. We witnessed a remarkable improvement in the security situation in our communities during the Christmas and New Year festivities. As a result, our people who came back in large numbers to their homes, were able to move about freely without fear of molestation. While we commend governments of our states for rising up to their responsibility of securing our communities, we urge them to sustain their efforts in this regard. We applaud our Vigilante groups in different communities, and request them to continue and sustain their efforts to secure the lives and property of our people. We would be belabouring the obvious to state that we need security for economic and social life to thrive in our communities.

2. On Fiducia Supplicans – A Recent Vatican Document

Recently, our Catholics have been asking so many questions concerning the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* (On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings) issued by the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on 18 December, 2023. That Declaration seemed, on the one hand, to reiterate the Catholic teaching on the nature of blessings and, on the other hand, to undermine that same teaching, especially on the application of blessings to 'irregular' unions. Given this ambiguity, the document quickly aroused mixed reactions of acceptance, sceptical reserve, and outright rejection from Episcopal Conferences and individual bishops across the world. We reaffirm the position of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), in line with the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), to state that: "the Church's doctrine on Christian marriage and sexuality remains unchanged. For this reason, we, the African Bishops, do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities."

In furtherance of our pastoral and prophetic mission, we reject the blessing of same-sex unions in the Catholic Church in Nigeria. We reaffirm the teaching of the Church on Marriage as the exclusive, stable and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, open to procreation (cf. Can. 1055). While we do not call for discrimination of people as a result of sexual orientations, the Gospel appeal for all sinners to repent is still urgent: "Do not fool yourselves; people who are immoral or who worship idols or are adulterers or homosexual perverts or who steal or are greedy or are drunkards or who slander others or are

thieves – none of these will possess God's kingdom" (1 Cor.6: 9 – 11).

3. The Rising Brain Drain as a Growing Concern (the Japa Syndrome)

In recent times we have witnessed a growing number of our professionals and young people desperately giving up everything to emigrate in search of jobs and better living conditions outside the shores of our country. This extensive brain drain is worrisome, and is denying the country the requisite manpower needed to revamp its economy and foster national development. Our young people are the most affected by this syndrome. As the country continues to sink economically, and as our government continues to accumulate more and more debts, many young people have been led to frustration and despondency. The situation is worsened by the high level of youth unemployment in the country, which makes our youths feel rejected by the very society into which they were born.

As Pastors, we cannot get tired of reminding government of its responsibility to provide for the welfare of the suffering masses in the face of the hard economic times. We urge government to initiate sound economic policies and programmes that can revive our ailing economy, foster growth, and improve the ease of doing business in the country. A peaceful and secure environment will encourage investments, and the movement of goods and services across the regions of the country. Fighting the menace of corruption and nepotism will help to enthrone the reign of competence and meritocracy in the country. Reforming our educational system will help to equip the young people with the needed skills for our contemporary market-driven economies.

But we must equally say that government cannot do it alone. We call on the private sector to liaise with government in generating employment opportunities, in encouraging the flowering of the entrepreneurial spirit that we know exists among our people, in developing new and innovative solutions to the economic challenges of the country, and in addressing the growing damage to the environment especially in the oil-producing and mining regions of the nation.

We call on our young people to be ready to imbibe the spirit of entrepreneurship, to be ready for the rigours of technical training and the patience allied with job seeking and professionalism. We urge them to shun the get-rich-quick syndrome and the so-called yahoo-yahoo menace. These speak of attitudes that are anti-social and easily lead to criminal behaviour.

4. Justice and Equity must Thrive

If our people are no longer proud of their country today, it is because they experience their lives as threatened by the absence of the rule of law, because they no longer feel secure in the midst of all the social tensions in the country. If we must stem the tide of the Japa Syndrome, then we must collectively resolve and work towards building a country we can be proud of, a country where justice, equity and fairness thrive.

Making Nigeria great should remain our collective dream. The Constitution of our country makes provision for federal character as a way of promoting fairness and equity among the ethnic communities and religions of the country. It is important, therefore, that for the sake

of social justice, national unity and cohesion, everyone should be given a sense of belonging in the country. At the moment there is the perception that some sections of our countrymen and women are not relevant in the scheme of things. This perception is partly responsible for the rise in agitations and the clamouring for the restructuring of the nation. As long as injustice and gross inequality persist in the allocation of resources and appointments into government positions, our dream for a fair, just and equitable commonwealth will not come true. Our democratic culture will remain endangered as long as no fair power-sharing formula is articulated. We therefore appeal to the different arms of government to rise to their constitutional duties, to work together towards the enthronement of the rule of law and order.

We are not unaware of the growing pressure on land inheritance as a result of urbanization and the quest for development in our communities. Land remains a critical factor in this quest. However, equity demands that those living now must think of the future generations in the way they share and sell ancestral lands. Those persons, families and communities holding in custody, lands of ancestral inheritance, must act with wisdom, vision, and caution so as not to mortgage the future of the youth. Our people must be educated to know that beyond the development of estates, land will be needed for increased agricultural output, food security and job creation.

5. Review of Stole Fees

Stole fees are meant to sustain priests in the ministry,

and the Church’s apostolate in general. They are usually fixed by legitimate authority at the Provincial level, to avoid simony. While they could be waived for those who are not able to afford them and should never be the basis to deny a Sacrament, they should be properly recorded and used for legitimate needs in the Church. Having looked at the situation of things in our country, we hereby review the stole fees charged in our Province as follows:

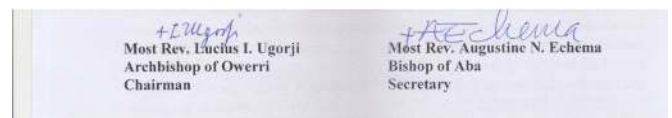
Baptism of Children of wedded couples 300 Naira

Baptism of Children of unwedded couples	500 Naira
Adult Baptism	2000 Naira
First Holy Communion	500 Naira
Confirmation	1000 Naira
Marriage	2,500 Naira
Mass Intention	200 Naira
Novena Mass Intentions	2000 Naira

These rates will apply from Easter Sunday, 31 March, 2024.

Conclusion

Let us resolve to keep our hopes for a better Nigeria alive as we work towards building a peaceful nation where justice, equity and fairness thrive. May Mary the Queen of Peace and Patroness of our Province continue to intercede for us. Amen.



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COMMUNIQUE
JOS ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE

Text of a communique issued at the end of the meeting of the Catholic Bishops of the Jos Ecclesiastical Province at the Catholic Bishop’s Residence, Jos, 29 to 30, January 2024.

PREAMBLE

We the Bishops of Jos Ecclesiastical Province, comprising of Bauchi, Jalingo, Maiduguri, Pankshin, Shendam, Wukari, Yola and Jos Dioceses, held our first Meeting for the year at the Catholic Secretariat, Jos Nigeria, from 29th to 30th of January 2024. After prayerfully assessing and reflecting on issues affecting the Church and the situation of things in this part of the Lord’s vineyard entrusted to our care we issue the following Statement:

Here in our Province our three main religions: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion have generally enjoyed mutual co-existence over time and agree on the sacredness of human life, moral uprightness, justice for all, especially for the poor and the vulnerable, respect for elders and those in authority, and many other common values. True as the above is, in our Province, religion has sometimes unfortunately been instrumentalized and used as a tool and justification for violence, oppression, division and manipulation.

The recent invasion and cruel attacks on some villages in three Local Government Areas in Plateau State where hundreds of people were reportedly killed and communities destroyed and displaced; the kidnappings and armed banditry in Taraba State especially in Zing and Yorro LGAs with the worse case scenario

in Mankin and its environs and the ongoing herdsmen militia attacks in places like Takum, Ussa LG and Yangtu Development Areas which have led to the displacement of people in over 80 communities and displacement of about 300,000 people with over 700 deaths are as unwarranted as they are condemnable.

As pastors of the souls entrusted to us we are concerned that:

- Despite all the efforts at promoting interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence, the territory is portrayed as a conflict zone, which puts it in a disadvantaged position globally.

- Barely six months after appealing for calm among our people, we are back once again to the echoes of women wailing in pain, children screaming in fear, smoke in the air, and chaos in the land. From the 23rd to the 25th of December, several communities of Mangu, Bokkos, and Barkin Ladi were attacked by suspected armed Militias who carried out a well-coordinated attack in no fewer than 26 different communities, resulting in the death of over 192 persons as houses were set ablaze and over 450 suffered varying degrees of injuries ranging from gunshot wounds to injuries sustained while fleeing their homes and communities; creating over 6 camps with over 20,675 displaced people and many others living in households.

MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE

As Christians, our faith teaches us not to be discouraged or despondent (Cf Rom. 5: 5). Though the story might not be positive, we should move away from the precipice. The task before us as a nation is great. Greater, however, is our trust in God and in His power to deliver us from our afflictions and tribulations. We must not be afraid to confront the issues facing us as a nation nor fall into cynicism borne out of resignation to fate.

While we commiserate with the people of Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi, LGAS, the government, and the people of Plateau State over the unfortunate incidents, which led to the loss of lives and destruction of property, we:

- Call for a return to the true value of religion as a positive force in rebuilding our communities and invite all Christians, and indeed all people of good will, to be salt of the earth (Cf. Matthew 5:13-16), in the quest for rebuilding our nation through political participation, contribution to sustainable development, promotion of the common good, social justice, the rule of law, and shunning primordial interests that inhibit peace and development of the society.

Religious leaders should remain the fathers of all regardless of denominational or political affiliation. They should guard against all divisive and inciting utterances and unguarded statements capable of creating confusion and or aggravating our already fragile security situation to create the needed change so that Nigerians can always live in unity and harmony especially at this critical period of our democratic transition.

We urge the Federal and State governments to investigate the escalating conflicts in the Region with a view to finding lasting solutions for peace and reconciliation and to scale up efforts towards restoring peace in the affected areas through programmes and policies that provide good and inclusive governance for the growth and development of society.

We urge the government to be proactive and to ensure

that better equipped and motivated personnel assume their responsibilities of protecting the land and its citizens.

While we commend the work of the men and women in the security agencies for keeping strong in the face of insecurity, we call on all of them to stick to the rules of engagement in the discharge of their duties of safeguarding the lives and property of all the citizens.

While we ask God in His mercy to grant the departed souls eternal rest, we also call on Government to seek ways and means of putting an end to land-grabbing in most parts of Plateau State from Riyom to Barkin Ladi, Bokkos to Mangu and indeed to the other parts of the State. A return of the already grabbed lands to the ancestral owners will reassure the peace process in the State. While there is a need to expedite action to ensure that IDPs are returned to their homes and to avert further attacks in the camps and outbreaks of diseases.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge and appreciate the recent spirit of togetherness displayed in support of the IDPs in the Bokkos and Mangu camps from the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria, the National Catholic Women Organization, the National Laity Council, Dioceses and individuals in these difficult times. We commend all the States in the Province and indeed the entire nation to the Intercession of our Blessed Mother as we invoke God's blessing on His people and look forward to a reign of peace on the Plateau and the Country at large.

1. Most Rev Matthew Ishaya Audu (Jos Archdiocese) Rertu
2. Most Rev Charles Hammawa (Jalingo Diocese) for
3. Most Rev Oliver Dashe Doeme (Malduguri Diocese) +
4. Most Rev Stephen Daml Mamza (Yola Diocese) Enam s
5. Most Rev Michael Gopal Gokum (Pankshin Diocese)
6. Most Rev Philip Davou Dung (Shendam Diocese)
7. Most Rev Hilary Nanman Dachelem CMF (Bauchi Diocese)
8. Most Rev Mark Nzukwein (Wukari Diocese)
9. Most Rev John Bakeni (Auxiliary Bishop of Malduguri)

Cardinal Okpaleke takes Canonical Possession of Church of Martyrs of Uganda, Rome



The Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia, His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke, will take Canonical possession of the Church of Martyrs of Uganda, Rome.

The special ceremony takes place today, Sunday, February 5, 2023 in a concelebrated Holy Mass led by Cardinal Okpaleke, alongside other priests from Nigeria and Rome.

It should be recalled that the Bishop of Ekwulobia Diocese was on Sunday, May 29, 2022, raised to a Cardinal by Pope Francis, alongside 20 others with the Consistory that came up later on August 27, 2022 at St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome.

As traditional in the Church, and as a sign of his closeness to the Pope, exercising pastoral collaboration with the Pontiff, Cardinal priests, that is diocesan bishops, who are Cardinals are assigned a particular church within the diocese of Rome as its proper pastor. They are equally expected to attend all major functions done in that church and officiate in them. One major function which is critical is the canonical possession of the parish and this confers legitimacy to the priest (in this instance the Cardinal) as the proper pastor of the parish with full rights and privileges. A priest however is also appointed to work in the church as an administrator who does the day to day pastoral work in the



parish and reporting to the proper pastor.

Recall, that, the Martyrs of Uganda from which the church in Rome derived its name and is dedicated to, was led by Charles Lwanga and his twenty-one companions. These were Catholics who suffered martyrdom in Uganda from 1885 to 1887.

There were however twenty-three Anglican Christians who suffered same martyrdom. This was under the reign of King Mwanga of Uganda, who mostly being a serial pedophile wanted to indulge in immoral obscenity with them which however was stoutly resisted and who in anger sentenced them to death, mainly by installment between

the year, 1885 to 1887.

The youngest of them being Kizito, aged 14 years was said to have been thrown into a boiling cauldron, was singing and thanking God for the gift of martyrdom till he breathed his last. Others were executed due to their refusal to deny their faith in Jesus Christ. On October 18th, 1964, Pope Paul V1 canonized them (Catholics) saints for dying for their faith.

We pray the good Lord to bless and protect our bishop on this historic event in Rome and beseech Him to safely bring him back to CADEK family ,that loves him so much.

Credit: Maranatha Newspaper



Cardinal Onaiyekan at 80: **CBCN lauds Prelate's diligence, simplicity**

..."My only assignment now is preparation for paradise"

– *Celebrant*

By CSN media

In a goodwill message to the Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja, His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan on his 80th birthday celebration, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), celebrated and congratulated the Prince of the Church and lauded his exceptional sense of simplicity, humility, diligence and his accommodating personality.

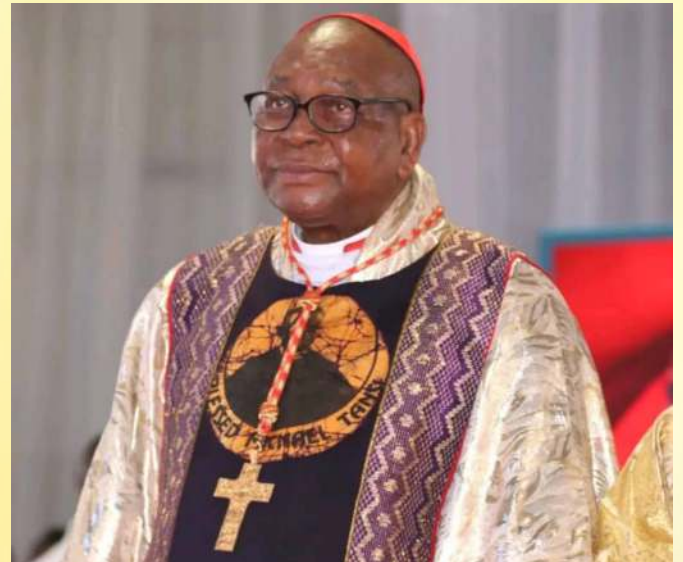
"We congratulate you, and celebrate with you. You are so accommodating, extraordinarily simple and humble. We are wishing you many more years in good health of mind and more. We pray that you remain with us for a longer time.

You are retired but not tired because of what you keep on giving to the church and your show of diligence to pastoral duties."

The Archbishop of Ibadan, Most Rev. Gabriel 'Leke Abegunrin delivered the goodwill message on behalf of the conference at the Thanksgiving Mass for the 80th birthday anniversary of the Cardinal at the Cathedral Church of the 12 Apostles in Abuja on Saturday, February 3, 2024.

In his homily at the Mass, Msgr. John Aniagwu disclosed that the celebrant has held every position in the church with grace and distinction, which makes his creation as a Cardinal in the year 2012 a well deserved elevation.

Describing the motto of the Cardinal "Fiat Voluntas Tua" (Thy will be done), as what has defined his character from cradle, the homilist stated that the celebrant has allowed



God's will to be done in his life all through his priestly life. He further called on Nigerians to emulate the words of the motto by learning to accept the will of God in all things, rather than try to subvert it.

"His motto is 'Fiat voluntas tua,' (Thy will be done), is what has defined his life from cradle. He has allowed God's will to be done in his life all through his priestly life. I will like to recommend that motto to all and indeed the entire Nigeria. We should learn to accept the will of God in all things and not subvert it. I believe that the day we allow the will of God to guide our actions in this country, things will begin to change for better, else we will continue to grow in the dark."

The Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, on behalf of the entire Catholic faithful of Abuja, thanked the Emeritus Archbishop for providing the needed pastoral leadership to the Archdiocese for good 27 years with apostolic courage. He lauded his ecumenical wisdom and his ability to manage many things at the same time.

In his response, the celebrant, His Eminence John Cardinal Onaiyekan, thanked God for his graciousness upon his life as he attains the age of 80. He disclosed that as he looks forward to the future, his only assignment on earth now, is preparation for paradise, and prayed for God's mercy upon his sins and shortcomings.

"This is a day of thanksgiving and supplication. I thank God for blessings received and pray for mercy upon my sins and shortcomings. As I look forward to the future which will not be too long, my only assignment now is preparation for paradise. I look forward to it every day, but in all things, let the will of God be done."

The Cardinal also disclosed that the high point of his 80th birthday celebration was his audience with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and the special birthday thanksgiving Mass at the tomb of St. Peter in Rome. He specially thanked Msgr. Aniagwu, the homilist for being a friend for 60 years.





COMMUNIQUE

IBADAN ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE

A Communique issued after a Meeting of the Catholic Bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province held at the Jubilee Conference Centre, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, from February 5-6, 2024.

NIGERIA: IN DESPERATE NEED FOR RESTORATION

We, Catholic Bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province, comprising Ibadan Archdiocese, Ilorin, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti and Osogbo Dioceses, after prayerful deliberations at our first meeting for 2024 at the Jubilee Conference Centre, Ibadan, have prayerfully deliberated on issues of Church and national interest and hereby issue the following communique:

1. New Year New Hope

We give great thanks to the Almighty God who has made it possible for us all to see another year 2024. God does nothing by chance and so may he accept our thanks and praises. We urge all the faithful and all Nigerians that, having given us another year as a nation, God has good plans for us all to hope in. His love does not fail, especially when we obey his commandment of love and live in righteousness. God's word to the Prophet Jeremiah rings true today anew and we must allow His promise to inspire us during this new year. "Yes, I know what plans I have in mind for you, Yahweh declares, plans for peace,

not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jer. 29:11) Let us understand that "hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope, and a hope which will not let us down." (Rom. 5: 3-5) If however, we experience challenges and tragedies, we must look inwards and retrace our steps as necessary, even as we keep up hope in God's promise.

2. The Ship of Nigeria is Foundering

Our dear country Nigeria is fast becoming a hostile, killing field. The ship of the nation is foundering under the weight of pervasive insecurity, economic hardship due to hyperinflation and the collapse of the naira, cybercrime, high cost of food, lackadaisical governance and widespread corruption. Day-to-day living is fast becoming an ordeal for millions of Nigerians because pervasive poverty, driven by the harsh environment has driven many to desperation and even suicide. It would be nothing short of hypocritical to put all the misery being suffered by Nigerians today down to change in world economy. The truth is that often Nigerians are simply left to their own devices and left at the mercy of the most cruel and aggressive criminals by inept and selfish political and civil leaders. In all this, governments

often seem weak or altogether absent. Any remedy now is even already too late for many Nigerians who have lost their lives to terrorists, hunger, kidnapping and sundry disasters. We plead for urgent action from all our leaders to save the Nigeria ship from sinking. The much-vaunted renewed hope is turning to utter desperation in many places and there is not much time left.

3. Violence and Bloodshed at Our Doorsteps

We decry the unfortunate events that have occurred recently right at our doorsteps in our ecclesiastical province. We are shocked by the regrettable kidnapping and killing of two monarchs, the Elesun of Esun Ekiti, Oba David Babatunde Ogunsakin and the Olumojo of Imojo Ekiti, Oba Samuel Olusola in Ekiti State and the kidnapping of teachers and school children in the same State. The same unfortunate fate befell Oba Peter Segun Aremu, the Olukoro of Koro of Kwara State and the kidnapping his wife and two others. Thankfully the latter have now been released. This spate of criminality is a brutal assault on our collective reverence for the traditional institution and decency. It signals the descent of our society into a hobbesian state of nature, nasty, brutish and short, even here in the South West. We also condole with the victims of the recent explosion in Bodija area at Ibadan. In all this we pay tribute to the sacrifice of our soldiers and security agents who risk their lives for our security, some of whom have gotten killed in the line of duty. May God rest the souls of the dead, comfort those who mourn, and provide for all who have suffered heavy losses from these events. We declare that the time to stop this spiralling violence and bloodshed is now, before it becomes irreversible, by repositioning our security agencies to make them more pre-emptive and proactive.

4. All is Not Well and Positive Change is Needed

We admonish majority of our leaders who talk and behave as if all is well to have a change of heart. There is cause for alarm when corruption runs riot in every sector with scant effort from government to arrest and prosecute its perpetrators. Things are not under control when continuously, Nigerians get maimed, kidnapped and killed daily on our roads and even in their homes. There is need to restructure our security apparatus and remove saboteurs where necessary so that they can collaborate and perform optimally. Disaster is imminent when people die of hunger and the living have to steal or scrounge for food in order to survive. Elected officers are elected not to make excuses about problems but to change things for better. Away with insensitive aides who furnish the public with lies and inuendoes in order mitigate government failure in the face of the recurring disasters. Nigerians deserve to know the truth about their leaders' programmes, activities and whereabouts. Any country run on corruption and falsehood will crumble under the weight of self-inflicted evil. Time for positive change is running out. "Uprightness makes a nation great, by sin whole races are disgraced". (Proverbs 14:34)

5. Be Your Brothers Keepers

The injunction of Jesus to us to love one another must assume fresh relevance among us Nigerians today. It must apply to leaders and the led alike. All who are in position of authority however have a higher responsibility because there shall be a verdict of history, a day of reckoning. We urge them and all privileged people not to relent in their effort to work for positive transformation in Nigeria. Government must upgrade the ongoing "governance by palliatives" to governance that promotes productivity, accountability and which provides essential infrastructure like power supply and jobs for the populace. It is better to teach people to fish than to give them fish from time to time, especially because Nigerians are among the most industrious people in the world. This would be an

effective way to limit the "japa syndrome," which is the forced exodus of our best brains from our shores to greener pastures. We thank a few among our leaders who are clearly doing their best to make a change for better in their various capacities.

We call on our Justice Development and Peace Commissions, our Caritas, St. Vincent de Paul our church societies, other Charity groups and our faithful in Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province to do more to provide employment and help the poor and indigent among us. The mission of charity is an essential part of the work of evangelization and the Church's mandate. The Church and her organs have very limited resources but must continue to bear witness to the mandate of mercy from Jesus which says: "Blessed are the merciful; they shall have mercy shown them." (Matt. 5:7)

6. Reinforcing Pro Life, Marriage and Family Values

We note with dismay the increase in suicide and murders among Nigerians in recent times which demonstrates that the value placed on the sanctity of human life is diminishing. This is a recipe for disaster. Likewise, marriages and families are experiencing greater stress today due to economic, social and cultural challenges. We reiterate the sanctity and dignity of human life and we call on relevant authorities and religious organizations to promote the preservation of Christian marriage and family values. To this end we call for adequate catechesis at all levels to form and inform our faithful and populace. We therefore strongly recommend that every family, married couples, young people and church groups buy and study the two-volume catechetical summary on human life, marriage and family from our Conference. Volume 1 is entitled: "On Human Life: From Conception to Natural Death and Volume 2 is entitled "A Catechism on Marriage and the Family." These two volumes summarise in question-and-answer form, the teachings of the Bible and the Catholic Church and offer deep spiritual answers to contemporary questions on the subject as well. No effort should be spared in equipping families to survive the current onslaught against that institution without which society cannot survive.

7. Welcoming a New Bishop to our Ecclesiastical Province

We rejoice and thank Almighty God that a new Bishop has been added to our Ecclesiastical Conference. We congratulate and welcome Most Reverend Anselm Pendo Lawani who was ordained and installed Bishop of the Diocese of Ilorin at St. Joseph Catholic Cathedral, Ilorin on February 2, 2024. He succeeds our late venerable brother bishop, late Most Reverend Paul Adegboyega Olawoore who died two years ago. We congratulate the Clergy, Religious and Laity of the diocese of Ilorin and pray that God empower and inspire the new Bishop and make him a good shepherd for the flock of God in that Diocese.

Conclusion

We call for more intense prayer for Nigeria as the Holy Father Pope Francis has declared a Jubilee of Prayer which has begun. Let us pray for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, queen of peace and hope that our dear country may reap the fruits of hope in God and experience abiding peace which will usher in a better future for all and sundry. Amen

Most Rev' Leke Gabriel Abegunrin
Chairman

Most Rev John Akin Oyejola
Secretary



COMMUNIQUE
LAGOS ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE

A communiqué issued by the Catholic Bishops of the Lagos Ecclesiastical Province at the end of their First Plenary Meeting for the year 2024, Thursday January 25, 2024 at St. Agnes Catholic Church, Maryland, Lagos.

We, the Catholic Bishops of the Lagos Ecclesiastical Province comprising of Lagos Archdiocese, Ijebu Ode and Abeokuta Dioceses were gathered for our first plenary meeting for the year 2024 on Thursday, January 25 at St Agnes Catholic Church, Maryland Lagos. After a fruitful interaction with the leadership of the clergy, the religious, and the various lay organizations and societies in the province, and having reflected on issues affecting the Church and the the nation, we issue the following communiqué:

1. Appreciation for Another Year

We thank God Almighty the giver of life for keeping our country as one despite the numerous challenges that characterized the better part of the year 2023 and we urge the people of God to look beyond the numerous lapses in the polity and work together in unity to ensure a more prosperous and fruitful year 2024.

2. Increase in Shepherds for the Church

We acknowledge God's bountiful blessings on the church in Nigeria and thank the Holy Father Pope Francis for the following: appointment and

installation of a bishop for the newly created Diocese of Katsina in the person of Most Rev. Gerald Mamman Musa; the ordination of an Auxiliary Bishop for Ahiara Diocese, Most Rev Simeon Okezuo Nwobi; the installation of the Bishop of the Diocese of Warri, Most Rev. Anthony Ovayero Ewherido; the appointment of the Auxiliary Bishop of Orlu, Most Rev. Thomas lfeanyichukwu Obiatuegwu; the creation of Aguleri Diocese with Most Rev. Denis Isizoh as its first Bishop and the appointment and installation of Most Rev Dr Habila Tyiakwonaboi Daboh as the new Bishop of Zaria Diocese.

We express our hope our desire that we shall have the same sort of joy and celebration in our Province in no distant future.

3. Steady Growth in Evangelization Efforts.

We observe the steady growth of the Church in the Province as shown in the significant increase in the number of parishes, deaneries, and catechumens. While noting that it is God that gives the increase, we express our appreciation for the evangelization efforts of the Clergy, the religious, and the lay faithful in the province and urge them to remain committed to the mission

of the Church with unity of purpose and collaboration for continued growth of the Church.

4. Unveiling of Marriage Preparation Curriculum

We give thanks to God for the unveiling of our Provincial Marriage Preparation Curriculum which will serve as a guide for preparation of couples for marriage in the Province. We commend the Inter-Diocesan Marriage Tribunal officials and the Provincial Marriage and Family Life Units for their hard work in the course of preparing the document. We direct that the curriculum shall be followed strictly by instructors and intending couples in marriage preparation programs of all Parishes in the Province.

5. On the State of the Nation

We are deeply concerned about the state of our nation as exemplified in the increasing poverty, insecurity, kidnapping, and worsening economic situation. We are very saddened that the living conditions of people have become worse now. So we urge government to show greater determination to alleviate the suffering of our people beyond the unsustainable palliatives being touted now.

We sympathize with all victims of insecurity: the ongoing slaughter of people in their villages that became notorious since the killings on Christmas eve in Plateau State, in Southern Kaduna among others; the activities of kidnapers in Federal Capital Territory; the Unknown gunmen in South East and so-called bandits in North etc. We pray God to grant eternal rest to the dead, healing to the injured and restoration to the displaced.

We however call on our political leaders and security agencies to improve upon their efforts and bring these threats to a good life to an end. People are already tired and dismissive of the assurances that come from government and security agencies after each destruction of life and property.

6. We urge citizens of our country never to give up on praying for the country but also never to relent in holding our leaders accountable for their actions and inaction in the

course of their stewardship.

6. No to blessing of Same-Sex Unions

We express our total agreement with the position of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, CBCN, and that of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) concerning the blessing of homosexual unions or same-sex couples. We affirm that the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage as the union of a man and a woman in a stable and exclusive relationship, open to bearing children, remains the same. We also affirm the Church's teaching on human sexuality and urge the faithful to be guided by it.

7. Conclusion

That our country is at a crossroad is to say the obvious. In the midst of all these, we must never lose sight of the fact that the true security and prosperity of our country lies in the hands of the Almighty God. As the bible says, unless the Lord builds the house, its builder's labour in vain (Psalm 127:1). As we navigate the challenges of the time, we must remember that the solution to our woes begins when we recognize that in various ways, we have sinned against God and our country and we are willing to turn away from our evil ways. "If my people ... humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins

Archbishop of Lagos
Chairman

Most Rev. Francis Adesina

Bishop of Ijebu Ode
Secretary

CBCN receives certificate of Appreciation from WAF-Tanzania



Most Rev. John Ebebe Ayah

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has been appreciated by the World Apostolate of Fatima in Tanzania (WAF-Tanzania) for allowing Nigerian delegates participate actively in the October 5-9, 2023 4th African Regional Congress of the World Apostolate of Fatima (WAF-Africa) held at the Catholic University College of Mbeya in Tanzania.

The National President of WAF-Nigeria, Mrs Mary Adaku EGBUNA, who led a ten-member delegate to the Congress, brought home the certificate, while the Director, Pastoral Agents Department, CSN, Rev. Fr. Augustine

OKOCHI, received it on behalf of the CBCN during the 50th Anniversary of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria in Abuja.

The National President of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria, Hon. Sir Henry Yunkwap, KSJI, made the presentation on behalf of the lay faithful.

WAF-Nigeria made a full and active presence at the Congress where Mrs Egbuna delivered a comprehensive report summarizing the Apostolate's activities in Nigeria over the years.

African Bishops adopt Nigerian ComWeek initiative

By PJ Usanga

The Pan African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS), in its resolution at the end of their 50th Anniversary celebration at Lumen Christi Retreat and Media Centre, Lagos, Nigeria, commended the Communications Week (ComWEEK) media literacy initiative of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, and called on Bishops within the region to design and incorporate World Communication Day/ Week as CEPACS annual programme.

"Learning from the regional associations of Catholic Bishops' Conferences such as AMECEA and the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, design and incorporate World Communication Day/ Week as CEPACS annual programme, whose activities will be part of a framework of raising awareness, doing media literacy campaign; and fundraising for communication activities."

At the anniversary celebration which held at from 19 – 20 November, 2023, CEPACS as part of its mandate to manage the operations of the communication apostolate in Africa, sued for a specialized training for media personnel in the local dioceses and Churches within the region. They equally propose for an adoption of appropriate digital media use as platforms for evangelizing particularly the younger generation who use online applications most of the time.

Charging all regional and national conferences to urgently engage in aggressive media literacy campaign, CEPACS, emphasised on the need for Bishops to deliberately commit resources, financially and otherwise to media development in their various dioceses.

Resolving to champion ethical discourse in traditional, modern and contemporary communication especially in new media initiatives like artificial intelligence in relevant circles, the Church communicators, equally called for the development of social communication strategies and approaches and to encouraged the dioceses to apply them in empowering all ecclesial groups.

The African Church communication vanguards, also called on the Vatican's Dicastery for Social Communications to Identify and facilitate learning spaces for CEPACS across the globe in areas of social communication in the Church.

CEPACS which is an arm of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), urged the Catholic Bishops across Africa to invest in both human and material resources to effectively create a media field of evangelizers capable of influencing the environment and culture of modern times. They also appealed to SECAM to advance collaboration with other international church communication bodies across the continent, particularly SIGNIS and UCAP, for learning and for a wider use of social communication in addressing common issues facing the church of Christ amongst others.

The anniversary celebration with the theme: "CEPACS at 50: Towards Promoting a Synodal Church in Africa through Social Communications" had in attendance over eighty (80) participants comprising of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Religious, regional officials of communication along with the local and foreign partners of SECAM, and most significantly, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Social Communications, Vatican, Dr Paolo Ruffini, as well as lay communication experts.

SECAM

‘Be courageous, steadfast and die for the faith,’ Bishop Apochi encourages fellow Bishops



By CSN Media

The Catholic Bishop of Otukpo Diocese, Most Rev. Michael Apochi, has called on all Catholic Bishops in Nigeria, to courageously and steadfastly hold on to the faith they profess even in the midst of the prevailing crisis and persecution of the Christian faith in the country and should be ready to die for the faith, because it is better to die for the Lord.

“The Lord is with us, and with the Lord, we can do greatly by holding fast to him, by leading our people in faith, so that in the face of all these troubles, and crisis or anything that borders on religion, we will be able to hold on to our faith and even die for it, since it is better to die for the Lord, because what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?”

Bishop Apochi gave this encouragement as part of his homily during the Mass on Monday 11 September, 2023, in the ongoing second 2023 plenary assembly of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in Abuja.

At the Mass, which was specially celebrated for the ill and aged Bishops in the Conference, the homilist who was also the Chief Celebrant at the Mass, called on his brother Bishops to encourage themselves and aspire to do more by deriving inspirations from the example of St Paul and from the words of the Psalmist, as captured in readings of the day.

“Already, without telling you, we are doing much, but we need to do more, you know how some of our brothers here, who are directly in the face of some of these troubles, are doing greatly, but together, supporting one another, encouraging one another, we can do greatly in the service of the Lord at this particular time, to be the Daniels of our time, to be the Shedrach, Meshach and Abednego for people of God entrusted in our care.”

The Mass and lauds which came after the Eucharistic adoration, was followed by the first session of the bishops for the day alongside other activities scheduled for the day-4 of the plenary assembly.



“We must bend our heads in humility,” Bishop Umoren admonishes fellow Bishops

By CSN Media

The Auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, Most Rev. Anselm Umoren, has admonished his fellow Bishops in Nigeria to emulate the virtue of the Blessed Virgin Mary by always bending their heads in humility and in gratitude for the overwhelming love of God upon their lives and vocation.

Alluding to the examples of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Joseph, her spouse, Bishop Umoren gave the admonition in his homily during the Mass today Friday September 8, at the ongoing second 2023 plenary assembly of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in Abuja, challenging his brother bishops to look back at where they were coming from, in order to appreciate how God has been gracious to them in spite of their unworthiness.

“We did not come from royal lineages; there was no divinity in our stars or genealogies; neither did our educational qualification or social standing privilege us for divine election. God simply chose us out of his own volition.

“When we look at where we are coming from, we must inquire like the Psalmist, ‘Who am I, Lord, that you are mindful of me?’ (Ps. 8.4). Like David, the man after God’s own heart, we must bend our heads in humility, and with gratitude for the overwhelming grace of God in our lives ask: ‘Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?’ (2 Sam. 7.18).

Like Mary, we must address a spirit-filled song of praise to Him, for he has looked upon us his lowly ones; he has done great things for us, and holy is his Name (cf. Lk. 1.48, 49),” he advised.

The homilist, also the Chief Celebrant at the Mass which was celebrated in commemoration of the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, intimated the bishops that the celebration is an encouragement to them that God has not given up on them no matter the challenges they are going through, but that God has through the celebration, offered them an opportunity for renewal and a fresh beginning.

“Therefore, we cannot afford not to turn to her (Mary) for guidance and direction in living out our divine vocation before God and his church in the world, when we first heard the tiny little voice that said to each one of us, ‘follow me,” he further admonished.



FIDUCIA SUPPLICANS: Summary of responses by 10 African Bishops Conferences

By Fr. Okhueigbe Osemhantie

1. Cameroun

Faithful to the constant teaching of Ecclesial Tradition which declares acts of homosexuality intrinsically disordered and contrary to the natural law (Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 2357), we, the Bishops of Cameroon, reiterate our disapproval of homosexuality and homosexual unions.

Consequently, we formally forbid all blessings of "homosexual couples" in the Church of Cameroon. (Nos. 7&8)

2. Malawi

We direct that for pastoral reasons, blessings of any kind and for same sex unions of any kind, are not permitted in Malawi

3. Zambia

"To avoid any pastoral confusion and ambiguity as well as not to break the law of our country which forbids same-sex unions and activities, and while listening to our cultural heritage which does not accept same-sex relationships. The guidelines in Fiducia Supplicans are for further reflection and not for implementation in Zambia."

4. Nigeria

There is no possibility in the Church of blessing same-sex unions and activities," permitting such blessings would go against God's law, the teachings of the Church, the laws of our nation and the cultural sensibilities of our people

5. Burkina Faso & Niger

Catholic doctrine on marriage does not change, and the Church does not approve of irregular or same-sex unions."

6. Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops

The document does not in any way approve of 'Same-sex Marriages' nor try to give a back-door recognition of such a union. It does not seek an alternative 'union blessing' to substitute a Sacramental marriage."

"This Document does not change in any way the understanding of Marriage as a Sacrament in the Church, an indissoluble union between a man and a woman, for life".

7. Catholic Bishops of South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini

"The suggestions offered by the declaration may be taken

as a guide with prudence, we will guide further on how such a blessing may be requested and granted to avoid the confusion the document warns against.

8. Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference

"This Declaration does not give Catholic priests the permission to bless same-sex marriages." The document defines marriage as an "exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children.

9. Zimbabwe

In respect of the law of the land, our culture and for moral reasons we instruct pastors to desist from actions that may be deemed as the blessing of same sex unions bringing confusion and even scandal to our people

10. Uganda

The blessing which the Declaration says could be given to everyone refers to prayers that people may request for. For those in the state of sin, the prayers are meant to lead them to conversion. Therefore, the prayers for persons in same-sex relationships are not intended to legitimize their way of life, but to lead them on the path of conversion"

SECAM

Cardinal Ambongo of Congo, President of Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa & Madagascar (SECAM)

"The ambiguity of this declaration—which lends itself to many interpretations & manipulations—is causing much perplexity among the faithful & I believe that...we need to speak out clearly on this issue in order to give clear guidance to our Christians."

No one who knows Africa well will be surprised why the issue is a blazing one in the continent. Africa is home to 265 million Catholics, or nearly a quarter of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics. Many of those Catholics live and their churches operate in societies where homosexuality is condemned and outlawed. Out of the continent's 54 countries, 31 have laws criminalizing homosexuality, more than any other continent in the world.

Thanks for reading

CEPACS@50:

‘Invent new ways of peer-to-peer communication based on communion not division’ – *Vatican*



Dr Paolo Ruffini

By CSN Media

Addressing Bishops, Priests, Religious, Lay faithful, experts and professionals in church communications, who converged at the Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos for the opening Mass to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the Pan-African Bishops Committee on Communications (CEPACS), the Prefect, Dicastery for Communication of the Holy See, Dr Paolo Ruffini called on them to invent new ways of peer-to-peer communication that is based on communion instead of division: “communion among us, communion of the People of God, communion of the Family of God in Africa.”

At Mass, which was celebrated on Sunday, November 19, 2023 to officially commence the 3day event, the Vatican spokesman, explained that communication is not just about the media and information, but is profoundly realised in Eucharistic celebration.

“Communication, we all know it, is not just a matter of ‘media practitioners’. Communication is not only information. It is much more. It is the gift that God gave us, human beings created in His image, to be in relationships with one another, to build a community, and to weave communion among us. By celebrating the Eucharist, we discover the most profound value of communication. “Communication” and “communion” have the same root.”

“This fundamental vision of communication as a connection, as a relation, as a way toward communion, was also expressed by the pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio*, which was written just a couple of years before the establishment of CEPACS.”

While emphasising that each one of them can contribute to making communication at the service of communion, Dr Ruffini disclosed it was for such purpose, that the Church established the World’s Communications Day, 60 years ago. He also added that communication is truly God’s gift that enables them to put in common what they bear in their hearts.

“Each one of us can contribute to making our

communication at the service of communion. With this purpose 60 years ago, the Church has established the World’s Communications Day (Inter Mirifica n°18), which has a threefold purpose: to instruct all of us about our responsibilities in communication, to invite us to pray for this purpose and to allow all of us to contribute with our material gifts, with our gestures, with our talents.”

Paolo Ruffini who is the first layperson to head a Vatican department, also advised that synodal way of being Church needs to be cultivated, and communications needs to be cultivated in order for it to be at the full service of the Church and family of God.

In concluding his message, the Vatican’s chief communications officer encouraged them to support each other and expand awareness for the care of the gift God has given to them to build relationships. He equally charge them to engage the youths in their communications system so as to enhance wider spread of information.

“Therefore, I encourage you to support each other and expand awareness for the care of this gift that God gave to us to build relationships. Together, we can witness our being One, our being “members of one another”. Together, through the radio, through the web, and through social media, we can build a system with the mission of feeding the word of truth, based on the experience of Pentecost interwoven with the spirit of sharing instead of the one of Babel. Let us engage our youth in our communications system. Let the message travel from person to person as something beautiful because it is true. Beautiful because it is personally experienced.”

CEPACS which was founded by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in the year 1973 in Ibadan, is the African region’s arm of the Catholic Church that manages the operations of the communications apostolate in Africa and also oversees all matters concerning the activities in the realm of media in Africa and Madagascar – press, radio, television, video, traditional, social media, and a host of other new forms of media. Its Golden Jubilee celebration which started with arrival of delegates on Saturday, November 18, will continue till Tuesday, November 21, 2023.



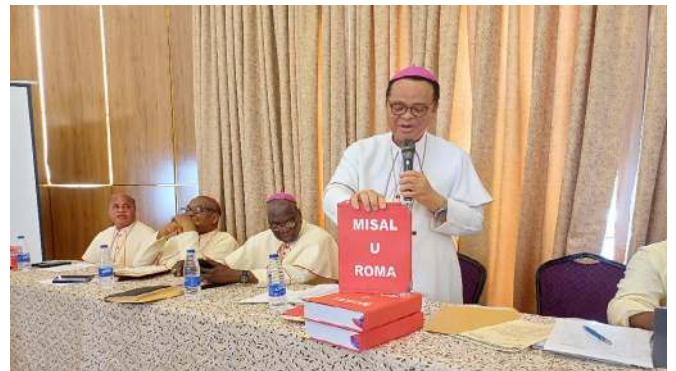
CBCN approves Tiv Missal for confirmation by Vatican

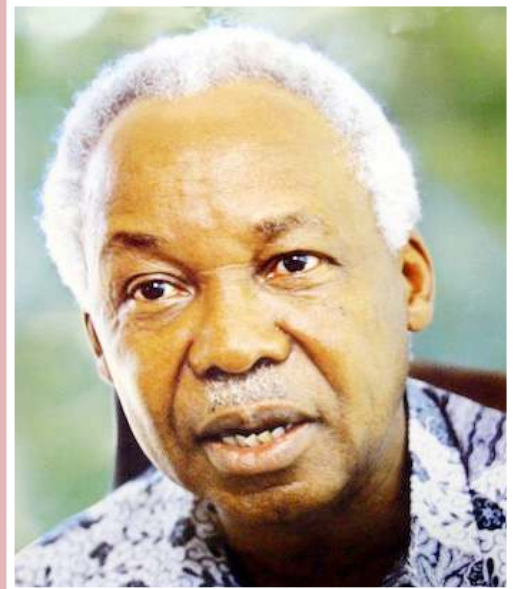
Following the translation and preparation of the Roman Missal into Tiv language by the Catholic Diocese of Gboko, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), in fulfilling the canonical requirement for translation of liturgical books into vernacular languages, had during the 2nd 2023 plenary assembly held in Abuja, voted in favour of the translated Missal into Tiv language for confirmation by the Holy See.

According to Canon 838 # 3, "It pertains to Episcopal Conferences to faithfully prepare versions of liturgical books in vernacular languages, suitably accommodated within defined

limits, and to approve and publish liturgical books for the region for which there are responsible after the confirmation of the Apostolic see."

The Tiv missal which has now fulfilled the second condition for publication, was presented by the Bishop of Gboko Diocese, Most Rev. William Amove Avenya, through the Director of Pastoral Affairs of CSN, Rev. Fr. Michael Banjo to the Chairman CBCN Committee for Inculturation and Translation, Most Rev. Denis Isizoh, who then handed the document over to the President of the Conference for the body of Bishops.





African politician on the pathway to sainthood

By CSN Media

The Catholic Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam has initiated the process for the beatification and canonization of the former president of Tanzania, Julius Kambarage Nyerere.

In an edict signed by the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Most Rev. Jude Thaddaeus Ruwa'ichi and the Archdiocesan Chancellor, Rev. Fr. Vincent Mpwaji, on the constitution of the diocesan tribunal for the cause of beatification and canonization of the former African political leader, the tribunal is to inquire on the life, heroic virtues, and reputation of holiness and of the intercessory power of Julius Nyerere.

"On 20th July, 2023, Bro. Reginald D. Cruz MAfr, legitimately appointed as postulator by His Grace Archbishop Gervas John Mwasikwabhila Nyaisonga, President of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference and Petitioner of the cause of beatification and canonization of the servant of God, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, formally requested me to constitute the Tribunal for the Diocesan Inquiry on the life, heroic virtues, and reputation of holiness and of the intercessory power of the Servant of God."

A convert to Roman Catholicism, who had taught in several Roman Catholic schools, Julius Kambarage Nyerere was a Tanzanian anti-colonial activist, politician and political

theorist. He governed Tanganyika as prime minister from 1961 to 1962 and then as president from 1962 to 1964, after which he led its successor state, Tanzania, as president from 1964 to 1985.

As a major force behind the modern Pan-African movement and one of the founders of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU) in 1963, Nyerere was a key figure in African events in the 1970s. He was a strong advocate of economic and political measures in dealing with the apartheid policies of South Africa. He was chairman of a group of five frontline African presidents who advocated the overthrow of white supremacy in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South Africa, and South West Africa/Namibia (now Namibia).

Nyerere was committed to the creation of an egalitarian socialist society based on cooperative agriculture in Tanzania. He collectivized village farmlands, carried out mass literacy campaigns, and instituted free and universal education. He also emphasized Tanzania's need to become economically self-sufficient rather than remain dependent on foreign aid and foreign investment. Nyerere termed his socialist experimentation ujamaa (Swahili: "familyhood"), a name that emphasized the blend of economic cooperation, racial and tribal harmony, and moralistic self-sacrifice that he sought to achieve.

SECCAM

Pope Francis prays for Nigerian families who lost loved ones on Christmas eve, as he urges parents to create time for their children

Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh, CSN

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has reached out with love and prayers to families in about 21 villages, largely Christian, who lost their loved ones following the dastardly attack and killings of over 200 persons on the eve of Christmas by suspected Fulani militia.

The Pope's condolence and prayers came immediately after his regular angelus message given on 31 December, the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, where he had addressed the world on the beauty of family life. "Unfortunately, the celebration of Christmas in Nigeria was marked by serious violence in the State of Plateau, with many victims. I am praying for them and their families. May God free Nigeria from these atrocities!" According to the International Christian Concern, "Suspected Nigerian Fulani militias attacked 21 Christian villages in Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, and Mangu counties of Plateau State on Christmas Eve, killing nearly 200 villagers according to government officials and humanitarian groups. The number of dead is expected to rise as families continue to search for missing loved ones." In the same vein, the Holy Father remembered those who lost their lives in the explosion of the tanker truck in Liberia, victims of war in Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Sudan and many other countries. He remarked that "At the end of a year, let us have the courage to ask ourselves: How many human lives have been broken by armed conflict? How many dead? And how much destruction, suffering, poverty? May those who have interests in these conflicts listen to the voice of their conscience. And let us not forget the suffering Rohingya!" Before his condolences and prayers for the families and victims of the various atrocities, the Holy Father had used his traditional angelus platform to address the world on the beauty of family life, learning from the examples of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He emphasized on how the humility of heart and the simplicity of gift of their gifts were testimonies to their poverty and suffering and a great surprise for such a special family. "They arrive in poverty, and set out again loaded with suffering. This is surprising – but how is it that, the Family of Jesus, the only family in history who could boast of having God present in flesh and blood among them, instead of being rich, was poor! Instead of having things easy, it seems this family meets obstacles! Instead of being free from hardship, this family is immersed in tremendous sorrows!"

He exhorted that the poverty, suffering and inadequacies of the Holy family should be a source of consolation to all human families, especially those experiencing one form of



difficulty or the other. "What does this tell our families, the way the Holy Family lived their life, poor, facing obstacles, with such sorrow? It tells us something very beautiful: God, whom we often imagine to be beyond problems, came to live our life with its problems. He saved us in this way. He did not come already an adult, but really little. As the son of a mother and father, he lived in a family where he spent most of his time growing, learning, an everyday life, in hiddenness and silence. And he did not avoid difficulties. Rather, in choosing a family, a family that was "expert in suffering", he says this to our families: "If you are facing difficulties, I know what you are experiencing. I experienced it. I, my mother and my father, we experienced it so we can say to your family too: You are not alone!"

Going further, Pope Francis also mentioned some ways of building a beautiful family; like couples finding time to 'marvel' at each other in the evening, because "Tenderly – marveling always brings us to tenderness."

"And I think it is good for couples to know how to marvel at one's own spouse, taking him or her by the hand, for example, and looking the other tenderly in the eyes for a few seconds in the evening ... And then, to marvel at the miracle of life, of children, taking time to play with them and to listen to them. And I ask you, fathers and mothers: Do you find time to play with your children? To take them for a walk? ... And then, to marvel at the wisdom of grandparents: many times, we shut grandparents out of our lives. No: grandparents are a source of wisdom. Let us learn how to marvel at the wisdom of our grandparents, their stories. Grandparents bring us back to what is essential.

Lastly, to marvel at our own story of love – each of us has our own, and the Lord made us walk in love – to marvel at this. And also, certainly, our lives have negative aspects. But marvelling also at God's goodness as he has walked with us, even though we are not such expert at it."

AHIARA DIOCESE:

Bring sympathy, kindness, graciousness, efficiency, and skill into your Episcopacy, Bishop Echema urges new Bishop



By Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh, CSN

It was a historic moment and a day of great jubilation and respite for the clergy, religious and laity of Ahaira diocese and by extension, the entire Mbaïse nation on 19 December, 2023, as the Catholic Church in Nigeria gathered at the Mater Ecclesiae Cathedral, Ahaiara, to ordain a bishop for the diocese, after over a decade of impasse.

The homilist at the ordination Mass, the Bishop of Aba Diocese, Most Rev. Augustine Echema acknowledged the power of God at work in His Church in resolving the crisis that had unfortunately rocked the body of Christ in the area; but he also had words for everyone including the new Bishop and the people of God.

Bishop Echema reminded Bishop Simeon Okezuo Nwobi, CMF, of the great task before him as a chief shepherd and pastor because, “there are many people in Ahaiara including some priests who have lost hope in God, in the Church, in themselves because of the thirteen (13) years of crisis.” Thus, “you have a mission to reassure the people of God that the Christian message is always good news.”

“This mission is clear as the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-3 tells us in the First Reading, and it is to the afflicted Nigerians beginning from Ahaiara Diocese, those who mourn to whom you are to announce the Good News of God (that is the Gospel).”

Besides the grave duty of comforting the people and fostering reconciliation and unity in the diocese, the preacher further reminded Bishop Nwobi to always pay attention to the socio-political situation in the country and avoid being indifferent or turning his back to the oppression, corruption and suffering that is ravaging the society.

“You are being empowered today to speak out in the face of injustice, to join (your) brother Bishops in Nigeria to become the voice of the voiceless and to cater for the many displaced families who have become refugees in their own land. You will become today another voice to denounce the mindless and reckless spilling of blood and destruction of property in our communities here in the South-East and elsewhere in our land. You must continue to tell those criminals who are involved that the shedding of innocent blood is an abomination. “Yahweh hates hands that shed innocent blood” (Proverbs 6:17). And those who kill by the sword perish by the sword (Matt 26:53).”

In order to be able to discharge these grave responsibilities successfully, Bishop Echema exhorted the bishop to pattern his episcopacy after Jesus the good shepherd, as found in the Gospel text of the day from John 10:11-16 where the shepherd was absolutely responsible for the sheep. Unlike the false shepherd who comes into the job, not as a calling, but as a means of making money, “the true shepherd never hesitated to risk, and even to lay down, his life for his sheep ... A real shepherd was born to his task. He was sent out with the flock as soon as he was old enough to go; the sheep became his true friends and his companions; and it



became second nature to think of them before he thought of himself ... Pope Francis talks about the shepherd having the smell of the sheep.”

“Jesus was the good shepherd who so loved his sheep that for their safety he would risk, and one day give his life ... In the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, there is loveliness as well as strength and power ... I pray that you bring into your episcopacy the sympathy, kindness and graciousness alongside efficiency and skill which will make you a friend of all. This is the way your predecessor endeared himself to the good people of Ahaiara Mbaïse.”

Additionally, while congratulating the new bishop, the priest and Christ’s faithful of Ahaiara diocese, the prelate admonished the people of God to rise from the past experience and work to ensure that the Church of Christ does not suffer a double tragedy of attack from within and from outside. He noted that the worst attack on the Church is that from within, from false shepherds; “the tragedy and disaster of shepherds who see their calling as a career and not as a means of service.”

Finally, Bishop Echema thanked the Holy Father for his “forgiving heart and magnanimity” towards Ahaiara diocese, and the immediate outgone Apostolic Nuncio, Most Rev. Antonio Guido Filipazzi, and the Apostolic Administrator Archbishop Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji and many others, for the great roles they played in the process of restoring peace in the diocese.

AUI convocation: Archbishop Martins charges youths on ethical conduct

...As Otedola becomes second Chancellor

By Constancia Uruakpa

Young people have been urged to inculcate integrity and moral probity in seeking greatness, as their journey to excellence must be guided by ethical conduct and foundations of humility in becoming the best version of themselves, personally and professionally.

The charge was given by the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos and Proprietor, Augustine University (AUI), Most Rev. (Dr.) Alfred Adewale Martins at the 5th convocation ceremony of the institution, held recently at the Convocation Hall, Ilara-Epe, Lagos.

Addressing the graduating students, Archbishop Martins said the concept of excellence is a path every graduate needs to pursue relentlessly in order to become the best version of themselves.

Urging the graduands to be creative and open to new ideas, the proprietor noted that excellence does not often follow well-beaten paths, but stems from innovation.

He reminded them that true leadership is not about raw exercise of power and authority, but about serving others as Christ instructs, and inspiring them to attain greater heights.

The Archbishop said the idea of humble beginnings echos the fact that true greatness is not one giant leap, but a step by step gradual ascent with humility as cornerstone in relating with others which leads to greatness and excellence.

He added that the pursuit of excellence is a lifelong endeavour; a journey that requires commitment, resilience, innovation, and an unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on the world.

In his address, the Vice Chancellor of the University, Prof. Christopher Odetunde, urged parents to give quality time in teaching their children fundamental moral values, so they (children) would have the wisdom to differentiate between what is right from what is wrong.

He urged parents to be good role models to their children such that even when they are not there to monitor them, the young ones will follow what has been implanted and taught by their parents.

Newly inaugurated Chancellor, Mr. Femi Otedola implored the graduands to embrace and never forget the knowledge they have acquired, even as he urged them to use it as a foundation to build their path to success.

The Chancellor challenged them to be determined, adding that their resilience will propel them forward as they embrace challenges and opportunities for growth.

In the convocation lecture, entitled, "The youths, the law, the technological age, morality and contemporary Nigeria", the Convocation Lecturer, Prof. Mike Ozekhome, SAN charged the graduands to recreate their values of morality based on time-honoured ethos of accountability, responsibility and self-esteem.

Emphasising that the family makes the nation, the legal luminary reminded parents that what they sow into their children is what they reap as youths and insisted that integrity is the strongest and clearest guarantee of success.



Most Rev. (Dr.) Alfred Adewale Martins, Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Lagos and Proprietor, Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, making remarks.



Mr. Femi Otedola, Chancellor, Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, flanked by Prof. Christopher Odetunde, Vice Chancellor, and Sir Steve Omojafa, Chairman Board of Trustees, immediately after his installation as Chancellor.

In an act of goodwill and philanthropism, the new Chancellor of the university donated the sum of 1 billion naira to the institution for the tuition fee of returning and incoming students for the 2023/2024 academic year, for the equipping of the engineering faculty and for the mounting of street lights around the campus.



“Nigerian Church great in spiritual richness despite material poverty” – American Prelate

By Theresa Ekanem

Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, United States of America, Most Rev. Thomas John Paprocki described the Nigerian Church as one that possesses great spiritual richness despite experiencing material

poverty and want. He expressed joy over the growing number of Christians and Catholics in Nigeria and the commendable rise in clerical vocation.

“I am very impressed about the number of people in the church, the number of Catholics and the joy that emanate from them. For example, yesterday we had Mass at Veritas University and there were over a thousand students there, we also had mass with the seminarians at the National Missionary Seminary of St Paul. I have noticed a lot of missionary vocation in the country. In all, I have seen a good number of people, the depth of their faith and the joy they have in their heart. Despite the fact that they may experience material poverty, but they have a great spiritual richness.”

The Prelate disclosed this in an exclusive chat with CSN Media during his visit to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) in the company of the Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja, His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan on Thursday January 11, 2024.

Bishop Paprocki further disclosed that the visit which was his first time of coming to Nigeria, became necessary since he needed to reach out to Cardinal Onaiyekan whom he described as an old friend, and the need to know the hometown of one his newly ordained priest who hails from Nigeria. He also expressed delight that the visit availed him the opportunity to see the city of Abuja and learn more about the country and the church in Nigeria.



Benin City Archdiocese: Process of beatification for Vivian Ogu



By Benin Correspondent

It was on the solemn feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary, where the Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev Augustine Obiora Akubeze during a Mass of the Archdiocesan Mission Congress held at Holy Cross Cathedral in Benin City recently, presided over the Liturgical celebration alongside the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Very Rev Fr Dr Augustine Ehigie, the Director of the Pontifical Missionary Society, (PMS), Very Rev Fr Sephen Dumbiri with members of Christ faithful in attendance, as he issued an edict that will lead to the call for members of the public to come forward with testimonies (whether positive or negative,) on the life of Vivian Ogu that could however be of good value either for or against the cause in pursuance of the cause for the beatification and canonization of Vivian Ogu .

Archbishop Akubeze processing the document of the edict went straight to the door of the Cathedral, flanked by the Chancellor of the Archdiocese, Very Rev Fr Michael Oyanoafoh, other priests and liturgical functionaries in a short solemn procession to paste the Edict on the front door of the Cathedral with assistance from the Director of Vivian Ogu Movement, Fr Dumbiri, shortly after the edict was issued.

Speaking earlier in a homily on “the Missionary Example of Vivian Ogu,” Akubeze disclosed that the virtuous life and heroic death of Vivian provide all with a good example of fearless witnessing to the gospel of Christ.

“Some of you may be wondering why we have decided to focus on Vivian Ogu in these past years of promoting her cause. It is true that there are others girls in our Archdiocese who were also killed at various times because they refused to be sexually defiled; while we commend the courage of these others, it is important to state that in the case of Vivian Ogu we find an extraordinary involvement in the mission of Christ.”

The Archbishop however clarified that, Vivian’s cause to sainthood is not just being facilitated due to her resistance in succumbing to sexual violation, rather he explained that her (Vivian’s) life style created moral impart for her younger peers to emulate before her martyrdom.

“We are pursuing the cause of Vivian Ogu not just because she refused to be sexually defiled but because of the missionary impact of her life and teaching on many children and youths in the Archdiocese before she was martyred. The biography of Vivian is filled with examples of her display of zeal for the mission of Christ. For instance from the young age of 10 years, Vivian had started talking to her peers to follow the path of righteousness.”

He added that she (Vivian) had started organizing other children for active missionary works especially to orphanage homes and hospitals. “She had embarked on a commentary of the gospel of St. Matthew. Little wonder when the Holy Father, Pope Francis asked that biographies of heroic missionary figures be proposed to him for the celebration of the extra-ordinary missionary month of October, 2019, from the thousands of biographies submitted from all over the world, the Holy Father chose just twenty five of them and our own Vivian Ogu was one of the twenty five.”

“Little wonder the former international president of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Archbishop Giampetro Dal Toso, representing the Holy Father, Pope Francis at the national celebration of the extra-ordinary missionary month of October, 2019 at the Vivian Ogu Missionary Animation Centre presented Vivian as a national and international model of fidelity to the faith when he said: “she is for sure an example, not only in Nigeria but all over, of how we can live our faith until the last consequences of our faith. And I am very happy that we have here in Nigeria this good example of a young woman who was ready to give her life for fidelity to the faith.” The cause for the beatification and canonization of Vivian Ogu will continue to make great missionary impact in the life of the children and youths in our Archdiocese and beyond.”

Akubeze further disclosed that, “on the 14th of September, 2023, we received the approval and favourable opinion of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria that the cause for the beatification and canonization of Vivian Ogu be opened, stating that it will be of great pastoral benefit to the Church in Nigeria. Hence, at this ceremony the Edict to call for evidence of the virtuous life and heroic death of Vivian Ogu will be issued. This important step that we are taking today expresses the reality that the church is a community.”

According to the Local Ordinary, the process of martyrdom also expresses this reality by making it possible for all to participate in the process of the cause of the servant of God, Vivian Ogu.

AUCHI DIOCESE: Sancta Maria Catholic College Of Nursing Sciences Uzairue Matriculates 55 Students

Fr. Timothy Etsenamhe

AUCHI DIOCESE —No fewer than fifty-five students were matriculated at the 3rd edition capping ceremonies of Sancta Maria Catholic College of Nursing Sciences, Uzairue - Auchu, Edo State.

Performing the oath of matriculation on the students, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Auchu, Most Rev. Dr. Gabriel Ghieakhomo Dunia, urged the newly admitted students to be law abiding for the period they would stay in the school, as the institution is governed by rules and regulations.

While congratulating the students on the success of their admission into the college, the Bishop admonished the students to make use of the opportunity they have gotten, stating that the college is one of the best institutions around for nursing sciences.

According to Bishop Dunia, "all students are expected to be disciplined and ensure that they attend ninety- five percent of lectures before they can qualify to write any examinations in the school", warning that cheating in any form and all fraudulent practices during examinations are prohibited and forbidden.

He said the college has a verification mechanism for ensuring that students with fake credentials are detected as some students have a way of presenting fake credentials for the purpose of gaining admission into higher institutions.

"The college is determined to make the learning environment conducive for you so that you can optimize your time for learning,"the Bishop added.

Highlights of the event was the capping ceremony, where the students were assisted to don on their uniforms, cultural display, entertainment with all sorts of food, and



group photographs with the Bishop and members of staff by the matriculants.

It is interesting to note that Sancta Maria Catholic College of Nursing Sciences, Uzairue, is fully accredited by the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria, and the council as collapsed its basic Midwifery program into Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) to constitute it into a full college.

You may want to visit our website for further information: www.sanctamaria.edu.ng

ILORIN DIOCESE: A Bishop is a man sacrificed for love of Christ and service to the Church – Bishop Badejo



By Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh, CSN

Preaching to a joyful stream of worshippers gathered at St. Joseph Cathedral in Ilorin for the episcopal ordination and installation of Bishop Anselm Pendo Lawani on Friday February 2, 2024, Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo diocese reinforced the words of Robert Cardinal Sarah that, "A bishop is a sacrificed man."

With Most Rev. Gabriel Abegunrin, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ibadan, as the principal consecrator, assisted by Bishops John Oyejola of Osogbo diocese and Jude Arogundade of Ondo Diocese, it was a solemn Holy Mass attended by 30 Bishops including 2 Cardinals, over 200 priests, many female religious from different congregations, seminarians, and a wide representation of the church lay organisations, with dignitaries, Government representatives, traditional ruler, and a multitude of the lay faithful from all over the diocese and beyond.

The preacher ceased the opportunity to remind his colleagues and especially the new bishop of Ilorin diocese of the burden and grave demands of the office of a bishop; as clearly a position for selfless service and not for vain glory.

"My dear Bishop-elect, Anselm Pendo Lawani, the second reading which you chose for today, from the Acts of the Apostles, gives you a personal roadmap for your new mission: watch over the sheep and feed them. As Bishop, preserve the sheep, (the) deposit of faith and the apostolic tradition from ravaging wolves as you act for men and women in their relation to God (cf. Acts 20). Know that the office of Bishop is not for honour but for function. It means you are chosen to serve rather than to rule, to be a pastor who serves, proclaiming the gospel when welcome or unwelcome."

Bishop Badejo went further to catechise that the action of the laying of hands confers the fullness of holy orders on the recipient, thereby transforming him into "a steward of the mysteries of God." As a result, "Christ will henceforth be present through your ministry to continue to confer the mysteries of faith on those who believe and add new members to his body, the Church."

Additionally, the Bishop of Oyo exhorted Bishop Lawani to follow the model of the Good Shepherd by being a father to everyone in the diocese; clergy, religious and laity. This requires that he strives to know his sheep, be available to them, love them and be compassionate, rather than lording over them like a typical Nigerian leader. "Hardly anybody would readily be a slave of another in Nigeria. Nevertheless, this is the life you are now called to model, to teach and promote as a Bishop. By God's grace, you



shall not fail."

"Count always on that Holy Spirit who, according to the rites of ordination today, gives life to the Church of Christ and supports our weakness with His strength. With the book of the Gospel which will be placed over your head today, the ring which will seal your fidelity to the Church and the pastoral staff, which will be given to you for keeping watch over the flock, the Holy Spirit truly appoints you, so fear no one nor anything. He is a spirit that unites, and therefore, invites you to promote the cohesion and collaboration of your flock, leading them to shun crass competition and pride," the preacher counselled.

The prelate reasoned that while the burden of office may make a Bishop's task seem frightening, for which reason Robert Cardinal Sarah, said "A bishop is a sacrificed man," nevertheless, with all the

priests, religious and laity willing to work with the new bishop, he has a reliable team, which in the spirit of synodality, he can count on. He urged him to also take solace in God's promise to the Prophet Jeremiah: "Do not say, 'I am only a child,' for you must go to all to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of confronting them, for I am with you to rescue you" (Jeremiah 1:5-8).

"Dear Bishop elect, I pray that God grants you the wisdom of Solomon in your ministry, to be fair and just to all and to govern with equity. With your God-given gifts and formation, your simplicity, humility accountability and for your capacity to listen and to comfort all, God has equipped you for the task ahead. Overall, My Lord, persist in being a man of prayer. More than ever before, the mission of the Church today needs the power of sincere prayers."

Address of Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe to the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast February 8, 2024

Good Morning and thank you for allowing me this opportunity to bear witness to the dire situation of persecution that your brothers and sisters in Nigeria are enduring daily.

We have been looking for ways to bring this to the attention of the international community and I am grateful to start with our own Church. Thank you for inviting me and thanks to Aid to the Church in Need for making this possible.

I am from the Makurdi diocese of Benue state in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The violent persecution and numerous massacres in my diocese have increased exponentially



since I was appointed as Bishop and continue to do so.

In Benue, we have 6 million inhabitants 99% of which are Christian, 80% of them are Catholic. They are mainly farmers living on ancestral farmland. At this time, more than 2,225,000 (two million two hundred and twenty-five thousand) have been brutally driven off their own land and now live in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, in makeshift shanties that are unfit for animals, let alone human beings.

Population

What is occurring right now in my own state and elsewhere in Nigeria is an organized, systematic, and brutal attacks by militant Fulani herdsman killing countless innocent men women and children and displacing millions from their ancestral homes.

Unable to fend for themselves and relying only on free-will donations. In most communities, children of school age are displaced forcing them to drop out while the livelihoods of their parents or caregivers completely destroyed." Such conditions make

children increasingly vulnerable to human trafficking, child labor, and organ harvesting.

Every day this population of widows and orphans grows, creating a new generation of traumatized and uneducated Nigerians, who will have few options for their future.

The living conditions in these camps is inhumane and would be seen as unfit for animals. As I visit the camps where they are living in these subhuman conditions, under such brutal suffering, I am at a loss. I don't know what to preach and it is difficult to console them, to support them.

Religious

They have especially targeted our Catholic churches and religious as well. Last week, on February 3rd, Father Kenneth Kanwa and Father Jude Nwachukwu, two priests from my religious order of Claretian missionaries were kidnapped. Indeed, every time a religious is kidnapped, it has the same effect as a terrorist attack because the villagers flee after losing their leader. Between 2021 and 2023 over 100 religious

sisters and priests were kidnapped in Nigeria, some never returned even after high ransoms were paid for their release.

I ask you; how many imams have been kidnapped? How many mosques have been destroyed?

The Militant Islamists attack most especially on our holiest feast days. This past Christmas, a large-scale massacre of over 200 Christians and hundreds more injured took place during a simultaneous attack to more than 20 villages in the Plateau State, north of Benue.

I share this with you so that the world may know that in spite of all of this, Nigerian seminaries and churches are full. Christian faith is growing in spite of the terrorists, or maybe because of them. As my brother bishop Kukah, of Sokoto, said "Nigeria has become a killing field", a field that is sadly fertile with the blood of its martyrs.

I want to thank you for listening to me, and to ask you to never forget your brothers and sisters in Nigeria. We pray for you.

Shendam Diocese: 3 Bishops consecrate Hill-Church at Kwanoeng

By Rev. Fr. James Tongret Dasat

The 8th of February 2024 remains a historical landmark of indelible significance for Shendam Diocese for the father (the Catholic Bishop of Shendam) and son (the Catholic Bishop of Maiduguri and son of "Mama Mary"). It was a special day of thanksgiving at the Hill-Church of St. Anthony Kwanoeng. On this auspicious occasion, Bishop Philip Dung of Shendam blessed the stations of the cross pathways; the Metropolitan Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama blessed the Cross while Most Rev. Matthew Ishaya Audu of Lafia Diocese, blessed the grotto of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The gathering had eleven bishops in attendance, about 300 priests; different religious congregations, male and female; the Laity Council President and his entourage; Royalty from Quaanpan, Mikang, Shendam, Langtang and their counterparts, Knights of the Church, CMO/Zumuntan Maza, CWO/Zumuntan Mata; Choir, Students,



CYON/youth groups, children, other people of the Christian and Muslim heritage; government functionaries; those with special needs, the visually and hearing impaired, the cadet, vigilante groups, G.B foods; gentlemen of the press and every adhoc photoman and woman, just to highlight a few.

Other highlight of the day was the journey round the hill for prayer; consecration of the diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; cultural and traditional dances and the Gino brand providing support for widows, orphans and the vulnerable besides the abundance of food and drinks for all.

May the seed of faith, gratitude and



thanksgiving spread its shoot deep into the nooks and crannies of Kwanoeng and beyond to multiply unending blessings to the national world.

Episcopal Ordination of Most Rev. Habila T. Daboh as the 2nd Catholic Bishop of Zaria Diocese on Thursday December 14, 2023 at St. Joseph Minor Seminary, Zaria



Episcopal Ordination of Most Rev. Pendo Anselm Lawani as the Catholic Bishop of Ilorin Diocese on February 2, 2024




Pope Francis appoints new Auxiliary Bishop for Orlu Diocese

The Holy Father, Pope Francis has appointed Msgr. Thomas Ifeanyichukwu Obiateugwu, Clergy of the Catholic Diocese of Orlu as the Auxiliary Bishop-elect of the Episcopal See of Orlu. The appointment of the Auxiliary Bishop who has been assigned the Tular See of Horrea Coelia was made public by the Holy See Press Office on Friday, January 5, 2024.

Until his appointment, Msgr. Obiateugwu was serving as the Parish Priest of St. Thomas Catholic Parish Umuna, Orlu Diocese. He was born in January 1966 in Anambra State and was ordained a Priest in August 1995.

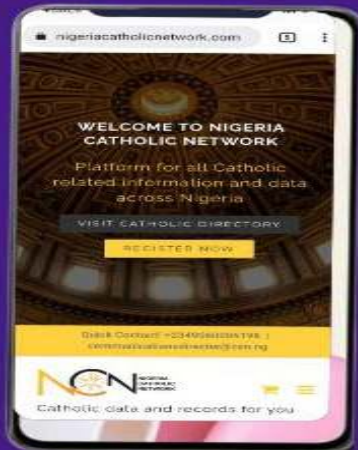
An alumnus of St. Joseph Major Seminary Ikot-Ekpene and the St. Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu, Msgr. Obiateugwu holds Masters Degrees in Philosophy and Public Management and Policy from the Universidad de Navarra in Pamplona, Spain and the United States of America - based Indiana University, respectively.

Obiateugwu has held several offices in the Church, among which are: Chaplain of the Joint Hospital, Amaigbo, 1995 to 1997; parish priest, St. Theresa Catholic Church, Amauju Isunjaba, 1997 to 2001; Parish vicar, St. Patrick's Church, Kokoma, Indiana, USA, 2004 to 2010; Chaplain of the USA Army, 2010 to 2017; Parish Priest, St. Michael's Pastoral zone, 2018 to 2023, and Parish Priest, St. Joseph Catholic Church, Umuna, Orlu, 2023.



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Faces of the new Bishops



Most Rev. Gerald Mamman MUSA
Catholic Bishop of Katsina



**Most Rev. Habila Tyiakwonaboi
DABOH**
Catholic Bishop of Zaria



Most Rev. Simeon Okezuo Nwobi, CMF
Auxilliary Bishop to the Apostolic
Administraor of Ahiara Diocese



Most Rev. Anselm Pendo Lawani
Catholic Bishop of Ilorin



GOODWILL MESSAGE

The Management, Staff and Students of **AVE MARIA UNIVERSITY PIYANKO NASARAWA STATE.**

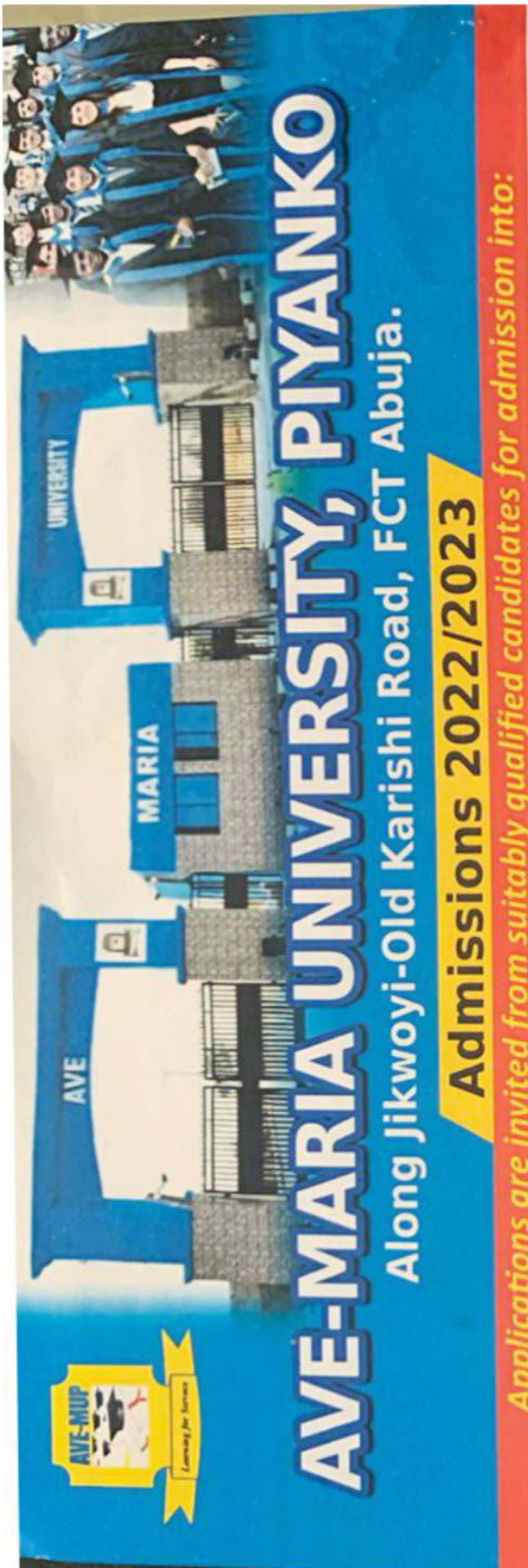
Warmly felicitates with the Chief Shepherd on the occasion of the first plenary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria 2024.

May the Almighty God direct the proceeding of the plenary. Amen.



Prof. Ignatius Onimawo.
Vice Chancellor Ave Maria University





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- B.Sc Taxation
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- B.Sc Psychology
- Political Science

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NSC/CCRN/2024/002

Date:.....

6th February, 2024

The President,
Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria,
Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, (CSN)
Plot 459, Cadastral Zone B2, Southern Parkway, Durumi 1,
Garki - Abuja.

GOODWILL MESSAGE ON THE 2024 CBCN PLENARY

On behalf of the National Service of Communion (NSC) and the entire body of Christ of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Nigeria, we write to felicitate with our Chief Shepherds, The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria on her first Plenary from 16th – 22nd February, 2024.

This Plenary is another great opportunity to reflect on your goals as our Chief Shepherds both as a group and as individuals. It affords you the opportunity to think of the future of the Gospel in our country as we face the erosion of the sense of sacredness of human life and the bane of materialism.

We urge you earnestly to reflect on the situation of our country, that things may turn around for good for the citizens of our nation and that this may be made more evident in our lives especially in these times of trials and tribulations. For indeed our God is really great

May your stay, deliberations and prayer reflections be fruitful, peaceful and grace-filled so that through it, new spirit and greater zeal will emerge for the continuation of the spread of the Gospel of love, peace and unity among us. We commend you all to the intercession of our blessed virgin, Mary and mother.

Remain Blessed.

Bro Celestine Nnamani
National Secretary CCRN

Bro Uche Manu (KSJI)
National Chairman CCRN

Rev Fr Okonkwo Irenaeus B. (PhD, JP)
National Chaplain CCRN

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Serving the CCR in the Church

The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing (John 5:63)

CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT

Activity Report From Caritas Nigeria

October – December 2023

The Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN) has successfully conducted a series of developmental activities and humanitarian responses over the past four months. These initiatives have been implemented across our thematic areas of focus, which include Agriculture & Livelihoods, Anti-human Trafficking & Irregular Migration, Emergency Response & Humanitarian Services, Good Governance, Health & HIV/AIDS, and Institutional Capacity Strengthening. During the period under review, several interventions were carried out, some of which are reported herewith. During this period, notable achievements include:

Medical Outreach at the Suleja Correctional Centre



The Caritas Nigeria team carrying out medical examination

On December 14, 2023, Caritas Nigeria organized a medical outreach for inmates and officials of the Suleja Correctional Centre in Niger State. The exercise aimed at fostering our efforts of bringing compassion, comfort, joy, and a sense of belonging to the often-neglected segment of society, especially during Christmas festivities.

To demonstrate our commitment to the holistic care for vulnerable persons, our team carried out comprehensive medical services. Our team also distributed food and non-food items to the incarcerated persons to meet their health, nutritional, and hygiene needs. Services offered included HIV screening, blood sugar tests, counselling, and distribution of pharmaceutical drugs.

Additionally, Caritas Nigeria liaised with concerned authorities to secure the release of 11 inmates. To further ensure their reintegration into society, they will be empowered with skills to help them attain self-reliance and economic stability.



CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT

Supporting Communities to Achieve Economic Stability



The Executive Secretary/CEO of Caritas Nigeria, Fr. Uchekukwu Obodochina, presenting a certificate of participation and start-up tools to a beneficiary

With funding support from the Conrad Hilton Foundation, Caritas Nigeria, is supporting vulnerable persons in Ado-Ekiti and Ikere LGAs of Ekiti State, and Epe and Ikorodu LGAs of Lagos State with an agriculture and livelihoods intervention that seeks to increase the food security and household incomes of the project communities. The project – Building Sustainable Livelihoods for Vulnerable Communities (B-SLIC) – aims to build the capacities of women, men, and youths in climate-smart agricultural production and vocational skills, as well as facilitate increased access to markets and financial inclusion. Working in partnership with the Institute of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, Sisters of St. Louis, Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel, and Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul, Caritas Nigeria empowered 800 persons in the project states with vocational skills.

Aligning with our goal of helping individuals attain economic self-sufficiency and social well-being, Caritas Nigeria, with the support of the project donor, provided the people of concern with practical knowledge in diverse skills like; hairdressing and barbing, tailoring bead-making, shoe-making, soap-making, catering, carpentry, plumbing, aluminium works, electrical works, phone repair, and auto-mechanical repair. To ensure a seamless transition from training to entrepreneurship, the 400 trainees from each state across the federation, were further supported with essential business start-up tools for their chosen skill areas. As part of their graduation ceremony, the beneficiaries exhibited their craft to the admiration of the guests in attendance.

In attendance were the Executive Secretary/CEO of Caritas Nigeria, Rev. Fr. Uchekukwu Obodochina, PhD, and his Deputy, Fr. Peter Babangida Audu, together with the Director of the Humanitarian Services, Nkese Maria Udongwo. As a testament to our collaborative efforts in fostering community empowerment and building sustainable systems, key stakeholders of the B-SLIC project, including representatives of the Lagos and Ekiti State governments and key traditional rulers of the project communities, were at both locations of the intervention to witness the hand over of business start-up tools to the beneficiaries. The intervention will ultimately create access to employment opportunities and improve the overall quality of life in the Western region.

Commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Every year, Caritas Nigeria organizes impactful activities to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which takes place on 25th November. The global event heralds 16 Days of Activism – a period set aside to call for collective action towards ending gender-based violence (GBV). This year, the development arm of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) headquartered in Abuja, with regional offices across Nigeria, carried out campaigns aimed at tackling the root causes of gender-based violence.

At Caritas Nigeria’s country office at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), the Holy Mass was offered for victims and survivors of GBV. During the eucharistic celebration, a correlation was drawn between Catholic Social Teaching and the global campaign against GBV, and worshippers were urged to treat all people with dignity. Staff of the CBCN Agencies were sensitized on the types of violence and preventive actions that could be taken to end gender-based violence (GBV).



CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT

Working Towards Achieving an AIDS-free Society



Participants at the HIV Recency Surveillance training in Abia State

December 1 is marked annually as World AIDS Day, an event that honours those who lost their lives to AIDS-related diseases, elicits community solidarity with people living with HIV (PLHIV), and heightens awareness about the pandemic. Additionally, the universal commemoration allows for improved advocacy for the expansion of access to HIV treatment and care while calling for the elimination of stigma and discrimination against

PLHIV. Joining this year’s celebration under the theme, “Let Communities Lead”, Caritas Nigeria participated in effective awareness creation, taking the initiative to sensitize the public through live television and radio programs and sensitization road walks. It was also a moment to reiterate the importance of getting tested for HIV and accessing treatment services as a means to eradicate the public health threat.

Caritas Nigeria’s Humanitarian Project Partnership Strengthening Meeting



The Deputy Executive Secretary of Caritas Nigeria, Fr. Peter Babangida Audu, addressing participants at the meeting

During a 3-day visit to Caritas Nigeria project offices in Northeast Nigeria, our Deputy Executive Secretary, Rev. Fr. Peter Babangida Audu, engaged in a 2-day coordination meeting with Caritas Nigeria’s Humanitarian team in Yola, Adamawa State. Discussions involved Caritas Nigeria and the Justice Development & Peace Commission (JDPC) of Maiduguri Diocese staff, addressing professional and personal growth concerns. The meetings produced valuable reviews, strategies, and recommendations to strengthen regional interventions.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT



The Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese, Most Rev. Isaac Dugu, flanked by participants

Strengthening Vibrant Communities Through Sustainable Development

Caritas Nigeria, in collaboration with the Foundation for Justice Development & Peace (FJDP) of Katsina-Ala Diocese, organized a one-day roundtable discussion on “Transparency in the Utilization of Externally Borrowed Funds and Equity in the Allocation of Special Drawing Rights: The Perspective of Faith-Based and Non-State Actors in Nigeria.” Supported by Caritas Africa, the event, which was held at the Dominus Dei Pastoral Centre in Katsina-Ala, Benue State, brought together participants from diverse backgrounds, including the Muslim

community, various Christian denominations, and other stakeholders. The Catholic Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese, Most Rev. Isaac Bundepuun Dugu, emphasized the crucial role of transparency and accountability in addressing the scarcity of impactful projects in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Caritas Nigeria expressed its commitment to fostering a more transparent and accountable Nigeria, encouraging communities to take actions that lead to genuine change and development in the nation.

Enhancing Public Health through Good Hygiene Practices



A staff of Caritas Nigeria demonstrating the preparation of chlorine solutions

The CHEERS-Flex project, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Caritas Norway and implemented by Caritas Nigeria in Adamawa and Borno States, aims to address the food security, nutritional, protection, livelihoods, and hygiene needs of vulnerable individuals. On World Toilet Day, marked on November 19 yearly, the project team conducted a training

for the Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Committee (WASHCOM) in Bama local government area of Borno State. The training focused on preparing chlorine solutions for latrine disinfection, water treatment, and cleaning household items, to reduce the spread of waterborne diseases and enhance public health.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT

Caritas is Church, not an NGO – Msgr Cibambo

By PJ Usanga

The President of Caritas Africa, Msgr. Pierre Cibambo, has explained that Caritas is a Church-run humanitarian organization that is accountable to the Church and report in full to the Church and not a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) that is collecting and distributing money.

“Caritas is Church; Caritas acts on behalf of the Church, as part of the Church, under the guidance of the Church and under the guidance of the Bishops, who are the fathers of charity, because they preside over charity in their respective and particular Churches.”

“This has to be understood very well, and it is also part of my mission to ensure that this is understood very well, that we are not operating as an NGO, we are operating as a Church,” he said.

Msgr. Cibambo, who was recently elected as the President of Caritas Africa in May 2023, stated this during the just concluded Caritas Africa Regional Commission meeting, which was hosted by Caritas Nigeria from 19 to 22 September, 2023 in Abuja, Nigeria.

The Caritas Africa President, also stressed that Caritas workers need to be professional, competent, and ready to serve with the formation of the heart as witnesses of Christ, because Caritas exists to serve, to accompany, to defend and be the voice of the voiceless.

While intimating that the Church’s evangelizing mission is realized in three inseparable ways: the spreading of the Gospel, the celebration of divine mysteries, and the work of charity, Msgr. Cibambo who has been at the service of Caritas Internationalis



for 22 years, noted that Caritas focuses on the third dimension which is the service of charity and called on Caritas at all levels to have a clear vision, get organized and be prophetic.

Speaking about his vision and hopes for Caritas Africa in his new role as the Chairman of the Caritas Africa board, Msgr. Cibambo disclosed that his main mission is to ensure that Caritas representatives in Africa are making every effort to support the advancement of holistic human development in their particular nations and to also supervise the operations of the regional secretariat which is there to coordinate the work of national members in the field of humanitarian response, integral human development and advocacy.

Encouraging Routine Health Checks in Local Communities



The Caritas Nigeria INTEGRATE Tuberculosis (TB) project team conducted medical outreaches in various communities in Ebonyi State, including Nkalah, Onuenyim, Agbaja, Nwofe Market Square, Ndufu Amagu, Ohatekwe Amagu in Ikwo, Izzi, and Ishielu local government areas. Utilizing an artificial intelligence-enabled mobile x-ray device, Caritas Nigeria’s medical team screened numerous individuals, including students, children, and the elderly for tuberculosis, cardiovascular diseases, and chronic illnesses.

Clients with cardiovascular conditions were referred to a cardiologist for prompt treatment while other beneficiaries were encouraged to undergo routine health checks.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT

Celebrating Peace and Strengthening Bonds: Oruru-Ukwu Festival and HIV Advocacy

In Imo State, our team actively participated in the Enyiogugu community’s annual Oruru-Ukwu festival in Aboh Mbaise local government area, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in achieving HIV epidemic control and fostering peace. As part of our commitment to a participatory approach in preventing new

HIV infections and ensuring access to treatment and care, we organized a medical outreach during the festival. Over a hundred persons, including pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children, received HIV testing services, consultations, and medications for various health needs.



The medical team from Caritas Nigeria offers HIV testing services to clients

Fostering Community Involvement in Climate-Smart Practices



The Akran of Badagry Kingdom with the Caritas Nigeria team led by the Archbishop of Lagos and Board Chairman of Caritas Nigeria, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins

In preparation for year 2 of the Building Sustainable Livelihoods for Vibrant Communities (B-SLiC) project, the team, along with the Dean of Badagry Deanery, Rev. Fr. George Anubuike, advocated for local community involvement in addressing climate change issues in agriculture to mitigate the risk of food shortages. The Caritas Nigeria B-SLiC project team, accompanied by project partners, recently conducted a courtesy visit to stakeholders in the Badagry region of Lagos State. Led by Caritas Nigeria Board Chairman and Archbishop of Lagos, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins, the team met with His Royal Majesty De Wheno, Aholu Menu Toyi OFR, D.Litt., the Akran of Badagry Kingdom, discussing the project’s goals and seeking support for its implementation in Badagry.

These interactions with community and Church leaders highlight the commitment to community development and sustainable livelihoods in Nigeria. Funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the B-SLiC project empowers local farmers with climate-smart agricultural practices. It contributes to food security, economic growth, and sustainable development by promoting modern farming techniques, improving infrastructure, and facilitating access to markets.



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GOODWILL MESSAGE

On behalf of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN), we extend our warmest greetings and heartfelt goodwill to the esteemed members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) on the occasion of the First Plenary Session, from 16th to 22nd February, 2024. It is with great respect and humility that we present our collective concerns and aspirations for the Church in Nigeria.

First and foremost, we commend the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria for selecting the thought-provoking Theme, "Synod on Synodality: Areas of Concern for the Church in Nigeria." This crucial choice reflects the urgency to address pertinent issues facing the Church within our nation. We applaud your commitment to fostering unity, inclusivity, and effective pastoral engagement through the process of synodality.

We express our heartfelt appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria in nurturing and strengthening our faith. Your steadfast leadership in shepherding the flock of believers truly enhances the spiritual well-being of the Catholic community in Nigeria. As members of the Laity, we fully acknowledge and embrace our role as active participants in the mission of the Church, and we stand ready to collaborate closely with you for the growth and development of our beloved Church.

May the Holy Spirit guide the deliberations of the 2024 First Plenary Session, granting wisdom, discernment, and unity to the participants. As members of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria, we pledge our renewed commitment to actively support and partner with the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria in advancing the mission of the Church in Nigeria.

We wish you fruitful and blessed session.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Hon. (Sir) Henry H. Yunkwap KSJL, JP
National President,
Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria

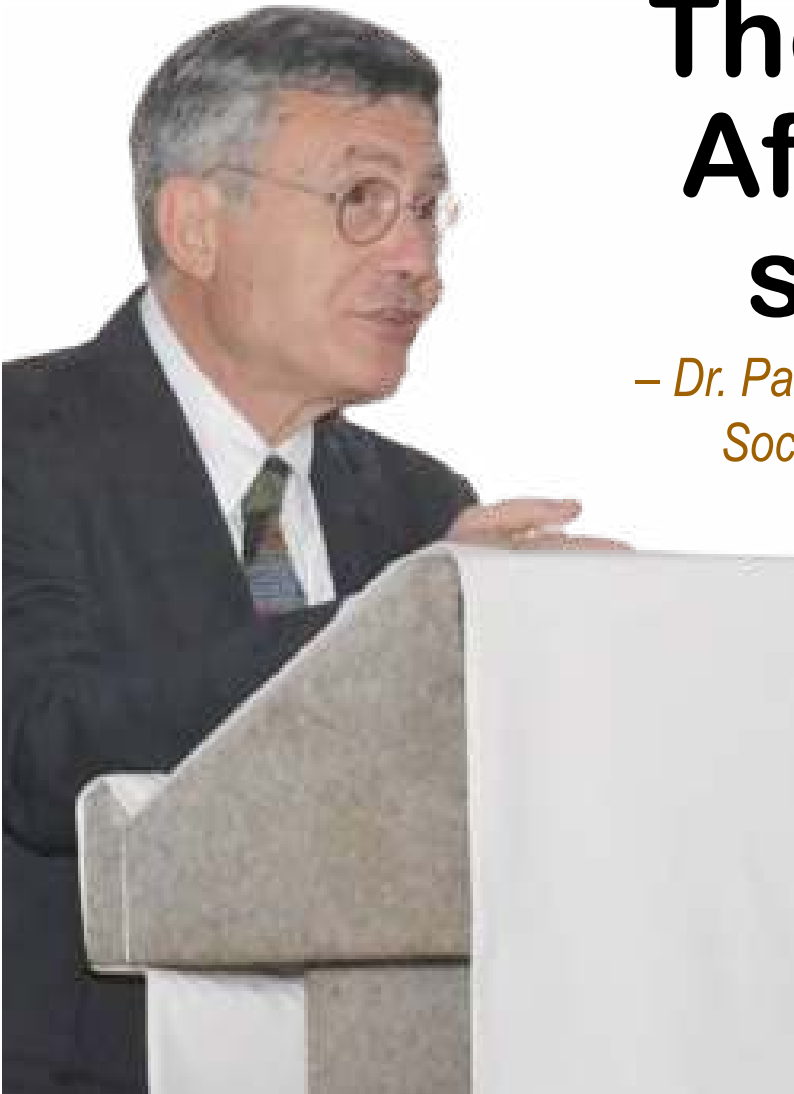
Barr. Dame Chisara W. Egwim-Chima (LAW, JP, OSE)
National Secretary-General,
Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria

Motto: Salt of the Earth and Light of the World

SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Church in Africa needs structures

– Dr. Paolo Ruffini, Prefect, Dicastery of Social Communications, Vatican



Dr. Paolo Ruffini, Prefect, Dicastery of Social Communications, Vatican has tasked members of the Pan African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS) to set up structures for the Church in Africa, steer clear of mistakes of the past to spread God's words effectively while also promoting a synodal Church. He gave this charge while delivering the keynote address at the 50th anniversary celebration of CEPACS held recently at Lumen Christi Television network, Lagos Nigeria. The Vatican Prefect said, "Africa is full of life! But this abundance of life also needs a skeleton, a structure, in order to move effectively."

He described the features of the structure; "This structure should not be "feudal", should not be "colonial". Please, do not repeat the same mistakes of the old continent! "The Church in Africa needs structures rooted in the Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. "The Church must remain alive and dynamic to respond effectively to its divine mission of evangelisation and communication," as it is well written in the CEPACS' statutes. "The structures should always be at the service of the life, at the service of the mission of the Church in our time."

He urged members of CEPACS to utilise the anniversary event as a starting point of a revival and effective revitalisation for communication reorganisation at all levels of a continent whose Catholic communities are delivering so many hopes through their youth and dynamism. "Memory-making is always healthy. It makes us look inside our history to find there not only our roots, but also our future. The good things to be grateful for and the mistakes to be corrected.

"We need to commemorate in order to remember a history that is our own, that belongs to us, but it is also bigger than us, and it transcends us. Nothing begins and nothing will end with us. Only by keeping the past alive can we build a future that is not founded on sand. Our history, our stories, are our foundations. All of us – looking back – must ask ourselves: What is the story we tell and have told? Does it still speak of the Kingdom of God? "Where are we in our journey? How far have we travelled? And toward where?" "We are celebrating this Jubilee "towards promoting a synodal church in Africa through Social Communications."

We have embarked in this journey to witness that another way of being together is possible. "To always value, as people of God united by baptism, what unites us and never what divides us. "To understand that the co-responsibility to which everyone is called-in the diversity of charisms and ministries-is a service and not a power. "To rediscover, within the Church-Family of God, the importance of each person; and especially of the communion that makes us one, members of one another. "To be a welcoming Church for all. Everyone, no one excluded." The Prefect of the Dicastery of Social Communications noted that the secret of communication is not technique but love.

Identifying charity as the only one rule that describes the constitutively synodal Church, he stated that communication is first and foremost a mutual gift of ourselves, a gift that comes from the relationship we establish with the other. "If we look at the Latin root of the word "communication," we can see that it combines two other words: cum, together, and munus, gift. If we go back to the early Christians, we rediscover that this was their first source of communication. They were recognised by love. Love and compassion were their universal language. "The Word of God is by his nature word, dialogue and communication. "There was no social network at that time. No computers. No internet. No television. No radio and no printed media.

But there were disciples, the first communicators, the

SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS



first witnesses. “Evangelisation has always been composed by content (the Gospel) and a witness who communicates the message not only with words, but with his body, his way of life, with the relationships he builds. “Jesus wants evangelisers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God’s presence,” as Pope Francis wrote in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (no. 259). “The first “means of communication” of the Gospel is thus our life, our whole life, transfigured by communion with God and communion with one another. Dr. Ruffini stressed that to spread the Christian message it is not enough to use the media, it is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications.”

According to him, there is no mission without communion; and there is no communion without communication. The Vatican helmsman of Social Communications advocated the need to care for communication, that is at the service of a wise stewardship and leadership, with transparency and accountability. He said, “We need each other to journey and grow together in this regard: diocesan, national, regional, continental and universal levels. “We are here to acknowledge, all together, that investment in communication is not something that comes at the end of all other concerns. It is often the first field and form of charity. “We need to establish the communication needs to better “journey together”, to build a synodal Church. “We all share the responsibility for the Catholic communication.

We need to connect people who are willing to contribute with their skills and talents, with their resources and prayers. Dr. Ruffini tasked CEPACS on an urgent need for formation deeply rooted in communication for communion.” He added, “We need young professionals who are also rooted in

faith. A current educational urgency is to create innovative processes that help young people to grow in discernment and critical thinking and learn to work as a team, possibly in “learning by doing” experiences. Our experience with some pilot projects at the Dicastery confirms us in this belief: if you give young people trust, they will give you their talents and commitment.”

On Artificial Intelligence, he had this to say: “We are the ones who invented it. And we are the ones who have to guide it. With our heart, which makes our intelligence unique, because it is based not only on our intellect, on our ability to connect knowledge, but also on our ability to love.” He challenged the Catholic Communicators to negotiate the algorithm, with their hearts, and discern between a soulless compilation of data and a storytelling with soul. “The heart tells us that there will always be things that technology cannot replace. Like freedom. Like the miracle of the encounter between people. Like the surprise of the unexpected. The conversion. The forgiveness. The gratuitous love that is not based on strength or on self-assertion, but on the supreme fragility of feeling unfulfilled, on the need to give and to give yourself.”

This requires negotiating and achieving transparency of algorithms, and interoperability of platforms, programming artificial intelligence to serve humans. “We can accept being bought and sold, profiled and marketed; or we can seek another rule of the game.” On a final note, the Vatican Prefect remarked that Artificial Intelligence cannot and should not replace personal responsibility, even though it can support decision-making and the ability to connect knowledge and people.

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SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

ComWEEK 2024: ‘Church to expose benefits, dangers of evolving AI technology’ – Padre Mike



National Director of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev Fr. Dr. Michael Umoh

By Emma Eko

The National Director of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev Fr. Dr. Michael Umoh has disclosed that the Holy Father’s focus on Artificial intelligence (AI), for the 2024 World Communications (WCD), will draw both the Church and the world’s attention to the fast evolving AI technology and prompt investigating and exploring its benefits and dangers so as to enhance a wiser

engagement with the new phenomenon.

Commenting on the proposed theme: “Artificial intelligence and wisdom of the heart: for a fully human communication,” Fr. Umoh in an exclusive interview with CSN Media, emphasised that if the Church must remain relevant in the present day social sensibility, she must be sufficiently present on the digital space.

Furthermore, the Communications Director disclosed that the ComWEEK is an extensive celebration to commemorate the WCD by the Church in Nigeria, which entails a week-long media literacy programme focusing on the theme of the WCD by the Holy Father.

Fr. Umoh also stated that as part of the Communications Directorate’s drive to promote an aggressive media education for the Church in Nigeria, the Directorate has with the approval of the Nigerian Bishops, developed a media education syllabus for the Major Seminaries in Nigeria and operates a digital media channel, the Nigeria Catholic Network (NCN) App, for real-time credible information about happenings within the Church in Nigeria, Africa and beyond.



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SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS



CSN Communications Directorate holds 2024 Media Parley

...appreciates and calls for collaboration from the press

By Fidelia Angbalaga

The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), through the Directorate of Social Communications, on Wednesday 7th February, 2024, organised the 4th edition of the annual Media Parley to avail the Church an opportunity to directly interface with reporters and pressmen on the religious beat to interact and chat a course on how to better frame the narratives of the Church in the media space.

Addressing the pressmen on behalf of the Secretary General of the CSN, Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, the Deputy Secretary General and Director of Pastoral Affairs, Fr. Michael Banjo noted that the events is an opportunity for the church to interact and appreciate the Press for their support and collaborative role in the socio-evangelical mission of the Church.

Fr. Banjo informed the journalists about the forthcoming 2024 first plenary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) with the theme: 'Synod on Synodality: Areas of concern for the Church in Nigeria.' He carefully explained the concept of Synodality as a call to walk together in communion irrespective of our differences, and called on the journalists to tell stories as they verify them to facilitate walking together as a people and a nation in the spirit of Synodality.

In his welcome remark, the conerner and director of social communications, CSN, Rev. Fr. Michael Umoh, noted that considering the myriads of events and happenings that has

overwhelmed the Nigerian society recently, a gathering of this nature, became very necessary. He appreciated the pressmen for their work and collaboration with the church and solicited for a sustained and more effective synergy.

In an interactive session with the journalists, Fr. Umoh lamented the level of insecurity, hardship and corruption that is currently being experienced in the country, and appealed to the pressmen to use their tool of trade, to defend the fate of the nation. He emphasised that now is not a good time for journalists to go to party, relax or begin to act indifferent, and called on them to live up to the ethics and demands of their profession, by telling truth to power and echoing the cries of the poor and the marginalized to the world.

Briefing the press about the forthcoming 2024 World Communications Day (WCD) celebration in May this year, the Communication veteran, disclosed that the theme for the year: 'Artificial Intelligence and wisdom of the heart for fully human communication,' as chosen by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, should be of utmost concern to them as journalism considering the digital spread of their profession and the ethical concerns of the new evolving AI technology.

In his Goodwill message at the event, the Director, Department of Mission and Dialogue, CSN, Rev. Fr Joseph Nomhwange noted that a session of this nature is important not only because it informs, but because also engages everyone in what the church is doing. He added that the activities of the church is centered on human development, and so one does not necessarily need to be a Catholic to partner with the church in building the society.

Similarly, his counterpart at the Pastoral Agents department of CSN, Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi, called on the members of the press to collaborate with the Church in telling the world what the church is doing, because the Church still stands as the salt of the earth and light of the world.

Representing all the media bodies present, Mr Oludare Adelaja from the Africa Independent Television (AIT), appreciated the Church for the effort so far, and pledged the continous collaboration of the press in driving the goals and pastoral mission of the Church.

The Chairman of the Parley planning committee, Mr. Emmanuel Eko, appreciated all the journalists for creating time for the interactive session with the church. He appreciated all for the support, and expressed optimism for a better and stronger collaboration going forward.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

‘Help priests not to panic at old age’ – Fr. Mike Umoh

By PJ Usanga

The National Director of Social Communications, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Very Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Michael Nsikak Umoh, has advocated that policies and structures be put in place to support priests in their retirement, so that they do not need to panic at old age about their welfare and survival.

Fr. Umoh made the call in his homily at the 80th Birthday Mass of Very Rev. Msgr. Bernard Ayodele Okodua, held at the St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Surulere, Lagos, recently. He charged individuals and organisations in the Church, to support the Archdiocese in providing suitable facilities for priests so that they can reside within parish communities in their retirement.

The homilist commended the effort of the Archbishop of Lagos, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins, for taking the lead so far towards the care and support for elderly priests, through the on-going building of a priests' house within St. Agnes parish compound, Maryland.

“As part of the fruit of this effort, one must not fail to thank our Archbishop for his commitment and ingenuity evident in the on-going building of a priests house within (St.) Agnes parish compound, Maryland. ‘Ingenuity’ because, with a vibrant parish community, presence of the Marian Shrine, the hospital, schools and a convent, Maryland compound, in my humble opinion, is a naturally suitable place for priests at retirement.

“It is the African model, because we do not push our elders away from the family, instead we keep them with us, in appreciation of their work when they were young and we were feeble, and in order to keep tapping from their wealth of experience and wisdom, which is their prerogative from God.”

Emphasising on the importance of caring for priests at old age and retirement, the communication guru, referenced Pope Francis ‘Laudato Si’ Encyclical, which extensively spoke against the negative and insensitive attitude of people towards the environment and older persons.

“In his Encyclical about caring for creation, Laudato Si’, Pope Francis warned us against the throwaway consumerist culture that, he affirmed, is damaging our planet and also infecting the way we treat each other. He observed that for older people this is especially dangerous because our relationship to the aged has significantly and negatively changed over the last century or so and as we come more and more to value people by what they can produce in economic terms, we value less and less both their innate worthiness as children of God, but also we come not to see them as whole human beings, but rather broken down, useless parts which are no longer needed in the capitalist mill.”

Insisting that the Church must set a standard for others to emulate on how old people should be managed in the society, the preacher condemned the prevalent ugly scenario in Nigeria where many of the elderly people suffer and die of hunger and pains after retirement because of the corrupt nature of few individuals and the negligence of those in

government, even as he maintained that “the true value of a society lies in the way the vulnerable are treated; the elderly and the retired ones inclusive.”

Concluding the homily, Fr. Umoh congratulated and thanked the Celebrant, Msgr. Okodua, for his dedicated services to the people of God and the Church, for his unwavering faith and commitment, and for being a source of inspiration to different people.



It is the African model, because we do not push our elders away from the family, instead we keep them with us, in appreciation of their work when they were young and we were feeble, and in order to keep tapping from their wealth of experience and wisdom, which is their prerogative from God.

PASTORAL AGENTS DEPARTMENT

“Insist on quality over quantity in your membership drive”

– Fr. Okochi to Catholic Knights



Director
Pastoral Agents
Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi

Bishop Ayah lauds Catholic Laity Council at 50, warns against negative societal influences, lack of accountability

The Catholic Bishop of Uyo Diocese, Most Rev. John Ebebe Ayah has applauded the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN) for its significant contributions to the growth and development of the Catholic Church and Nigerian society, even as he encouraged members of the Council be on the alert for negative societal influences, such as lack of accountability.

Bishop Ayah, who is the Bishop Chairman for the Laity, stated this at the 50th anniversary of CLCN held in Abuja from December 7-19, 2023. Bishop Ayah was represented by the Director, Pastoral Agents Department, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Very Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi.

“For the past fifty years, you have been the voice and the face of the lay faithful in Nigeria, promoting the formation of the laity, fostering their participation and collaboration in the mission of the Church, and advocating for justice, peace and integral human development in our beloved country.

“Over the years, the CLCN has grown from being the proverbial mustard seed to a giant and robust iroko tree in Nigeria’s socio-political landscape. Under the overall guidance of the CBCN, you have succeeded in mobilizing a large chunk of the Nigerian populace onto socio-political awareness and active participation in the exercise

By CSN Media

In his welcome address at the Joint All Catholic Knights Summit (JACKS), the Director of Pastoral Agents department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi, appealed to Catholic Knights in Nigeria to always place quality over quantity in their drive to admit new members into their respective orders.

“I would like to appeal to you to please always place quality over quantity in your membership drive. I urge you to admit to your ranks, Godly men and women of integrity and honour, men and women of good conscience and good morals, men and women who are loyal to the Mother Church and stand by her teachings to humanity.”

Admonishing them on the need to manage their differences to better fulfil their mandate as salt of the earth and light of the world, the Pastoral Agents Director charged the Knights to go into the pastoral field as members of one family filled with love for one another to become more effective evangelizers.

Fr. Okochi appreciated the Knights for their services and immeasurable contributions to the development and growth of the Church in Nigeria and the

society at large in the light of Catholic Social Teaching, and prayed for God’s reward upon their lives in this world and in the next.

The Secretary General of CSN, Rev. Fr. Zachariah Samjumi while welcoming the Knights to the Summit at the Catholic Secretariat, urged the Knights to initiate actions in defence of the Church instead of waiting for the Bishops. He charged them to infuse the Catholic values in whatever they do in life, even in areas of public service.

The Chairman of the occasion, Rt. Hon. Otis Anyaeji, appreciated the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and the CSN for organising the meeting to gather all Catholic Knights in Nigeria to rub minds in defence of the Church. He stressed that as Knights of the Church, they should have a deep understanding of what it means to be a Catholic, its teachings and doctrine.

The opening ceremony which took place at the Resource centre of CSN, also witnessed a keynote address by the Bishop Chairman for the Laity, Most Rev. John Ayah, Goodwill messages from the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN), Catholic Men Organization (CMO), Catholic Women Organization (CWO) and CSN College of Knights and Ladies.

PASTORAL AGENTS DEPARTMENT



A cross-session of participants at the 50th Anniversary of CLCN

of their civic responsibilities. You have spoken out forcefully against injustice perpetrated against the citizens of Nigeria, regardless of tribe, tongue or creed. You have inspired all the Lay Apostolate groups to engage in various activities aimed at capacity building in the areas of leadership and skills acquisition. You have demonstrated the power and potential of the laity as co-responsible agents of evangelization and transformation in Nigeria.

The Bishop Chairman stated further, "As we celebrate your golden jubilee, we also acknowledge the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of you. The Church and the society need your continued witness and service, especially in these times of crisis and change. You are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, to be the leaven that leavens the whole dough, to be the signs of hope and love amid despair and hatred. I encourage you, therefore, to remain faithful to your vision and mission, to renew your commitment and enthusiasm, to strengthen your unity and to deepen your spirituality. It is very important that you embrace the modern and efficient methods of administration and leadership to achieve your goals and objectives; I encourage you to engage the digital culture, the new media, to commit to the promotion of synodality and the protection of the environment.

Speaking on his capacity as the CSN Director, Pastoral Agents Department, Fr Okochi revealed that the CBCN has saddled the Department with the responsibility of

overseeing and supervising, among other things, the programmes and activities of CLCN. "I sincerely urge you, as leaders of the lay faithful in the Mother Church to faithfully implement the recommendations of the CBCN aimed at ensuring the smooth running of our lay apostolate groups; the rotation of offices among the three former regions of Nigeria is one such directive. Remember the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me as I imitate Christ." (1 Cor. 11: 1). Those who follow your leadership should see the attributes of humility, accountability, integrity, love, and honesty which are the hallmarks of true leadership seen in the person of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

"May we heed the voice of Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria in his directive on the rotation of offices among the three old regions of Nigeria, "Under God's guidance, we must continue to work together to make our Church associations beacons of light, hope and love for all members who seek solace and spiritual growth through them." All principles and practices that go against these words of wisdom, must be disregarded as you march towards the future.

"As you mark this milestone, I pray that God will bless you abundantly and grant you grace and wisdom for the journey ahead. May God Almighty accompany you every inch of the way as you march towards the future, through Christ our Lord. Amen", Fr. Okochi prayed.

PASTORAL AGENTS DEPARTMENT

The Youth Apostolate

CYON NEC/Elections

The Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), met at the Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre Benin City, from the 8 to 10 of February, 2024 for their 101 NEC meeting and elections. The Bishop Chairman for the CBCN Youth Committee, Most Rev Patrick Eluke was in attendance, with about 19 Provincial and Diocesan Chaplains. We 95% of attendance from the dioceses across the provinces.

The candidates for the various positions were thoroughly screened by the electoral panel, made up of all the chaplains and the expanded EXCO. Those deemed fit were then passed on for elections. The election was generally peaceful, free and fair. Mr Gosife Kizito Eze from Awka diocese in Onitsha Province emerged as the National President, while the Vice President 1, Elizabeth Chinaza Ojiabor, is from Lagos Archdiocese and Vice President 2, Hauwa Peter Zadv, is from Maiduguri Diocese in Jos Province. The position of General Secretary is yet to be filled because those who came up for it were screened out. A bye-election will be conducted to fill in this and other few vacant positions.

New CYON National Executives

1. Gosife Kizito Eze (Awka Diocese) President- Onitsha Province
2. Elizabeth Chinaza Ojiabor (Lagos Archdiocese) Vice President 1- Lagos Province
3. Hauwa Peter Zadv (Maiduguri Diocese) Vice President 2- Jos Province
4. Mercy Chiburuoma Gabriel (Port-Harcourt Diocese) Assistant Secretary- Calabar Province



**Secretary,
Youth Animation
Rev. Fr. Boniface Idoko**

5. Jennifer Chidinma Okechukuwu (Abuja Archdiocese) Financial Secretary- Abuja Province
6. Oluwagbenga Thompson Ayodeji (Ondo Diocese) Director of Social 1- Ibadan Province
7. Alexander Elochukwu Orji (Minna Diocese) Welfare Officer 1- Kaduna Province
8. Unity Ehizojie Imonmion (Uromi Diocese) Welfare Officer 2- Benin Province

Conclusion

We are most grateful to the Bishop Chairman for the Youth, Most Rev Patrick Eluke, and all the Chaplains who made time to be available for the meeting. We appreciate the Secretary General, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Fr Zacharia Samjumi, for the support he gives to the Youth Unit. We pray for God's grace and favours on the new Executives and for the growth of the CYON in general. May God bless us all.





President
Sir Steve Adehi
0803566621
08023040518

National
Secretary
Dame (Arc)
Rosemary O.
Azimi PM
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ASSOCIATION OF PAPAL KNIGHTS AND MEDALISTS IN NIGERIA (APKMN)

The President,
Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria
2nd January, 2024.

Dear Fr.

GOODWILL MESSAGE

On behalf of the Association of Papal Knights and Medalists in Nigeria we facilitate with the president of Conference and the entire Conference on the occasion of the plenary for 2024 holding in Abuja, FCT from the 16th to 22nd of February, 2024.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will illuminate your path and direct you as you meet to deliberate on matters pertaining to the church and society.

We wish you a successful deliberation.

Sir Steve Adehi SAN KSS KCSS, FCLArb (UK)
National President

Dame Arc. Rosemary O. Azimi PM
National secretary

PASTORAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Prof. Jerry Gana leads delegation on visit to CSN



By CSN Media

The members of the African Biblical Leadership Initiative (ABLI), led by Professor Jerry GANA, paid a courtesy call to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) to acquaint and request the partnership of the Catholic Church in a Bible based International Conference proposed to take place in Nigeria later in October, 2024.

In his introductory speech, the erstwhile Minister of Information and Culture explained that ABLI is aimed at equipping, inspiring and encouraging leaders to ignite personal and cultural transformation in Africa. "Though an apolitical and non-denominational initiative, her sole intention is to highlight the positive contribution of the Bible for the wider society."

Receiving the group of nine delegates, the Deputy Secretary General and Director of Pastoral Affairs, Very Rev. Fr Michael Banjo commended the efforts of the body to see that the Word of God permeates the political sphere, especially that of bringing the of Word God to the Leadership formation in Africa and beyond.

Speaking further on the purpose of the visit was the Ethiopian-born Dr. Girma Mohammed Ahmed who informed the gathering that the intended conference in Nigeria is expected to give birth to a centre, that will bring about qualitative transformation of a nation through

value-based leadership that is informed and inspired by biblical values. He solicited for every possible support from the Catholic Church which he said is the first point of call for the group for participants' mobilization and financial support for a hitch-free conference in October.

On the Note of appreciation, the Secretary General of the Bible Society of Nigeria, Dr Samuel Sanusi, thanked the leadership of the Catholic Church in Nigeria for the warm welcome and above all for the relationship that exists between the Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN) and The Catholic Biblical Apostolate of Nigeria (CABAN). He expressed his optimism that with the Catholic Church, hope is rekindled.

Other delegates include Joanna Heath, the UK based International Programme Manager, Bible Society of UK; Mrs. Chinyere Ezinwa, Bible Society of Nigeria, Abuja office; Barr. John Aji, Deputy Secretary, ABLI; Dr. Ike Neliaku, President NIPR; Ms Grace Benjamin, Programme Manager, BSN; and Mr Ishaya Yakubu, PA to the Chairman. From the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria were Very Rev. Michael Banjo, Rev. Fr Nicholas Djebah of Pilgrimage office, Lady Agnes Odido the Admin Secretary and the National Coordinator for Biblical Apostolate, Mr. Femi Adejo with representative of the Social Communications Directorate, Mr. Emmanuel Eko.

The conference is scheduled for 21 to 25 October, 2024 in the city of Abuja with the theme: VALUE-BASED LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR AFRICA.



PASTORAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT**CSN Pastoral Affairs department publishes 2nd Braille Lectionary**

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), in hearkening to the Pope's synodal call of building a church where everyone is afforded the opportunity to partake in the Church's ministry as an active agent, had on September 8, 2023, through the Pastoral Affairs Department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), published the 2nd edition of the Sunday Lectionary in Braille for liturgical year B.

The Braille Lectionary which was first published in 2022 for the Church's liturgical year A, is designed to enhance and create an opportunity for members of Christ's faithful who are visually impaired and are at most times left at the margin of the society to exercise their ecclesiastical ministries of the proclamation of the word of God at public worship.

It could be recalled that on October 10, 2021, during the inauguration of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops by Pope Francis, a pivotal message was sent out to the entire Catholic world that the Church is synodal and therefore, must in all her undertakings, be characterised by the elements of Synodality. By this, the Church invited all Christ's faithful irrespective of tribe, race, language, social status, physical abilities and otherwise, to journey together as one family of God.

CBCN Liturgy/Pastoral Committee publishes Liturgical Catechesis Bulletin

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Liturgy/Pastoral Committee, a unit of the Pastoral Affairs Department, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), as part of its concerns of promoting catechetical evangelisation has published the maiden edition of her quarterly bulletin, titled: Liturgical Catechesis.

In this first edition, the Liturgical Catechesis, which is designed to foster a more inclusive participation in the liturgical life of the Church, focused on the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (Holy Mass), from the preparation for Mass to the liturgical greeting.

The bulletin, which is an online publication, will be periodically published on the Nigeria Catholic Network App. (NCN App).

'Compose guidelines for Catholic choirs in Nigeria,' Fr Banjo urges NACALIMCON leadership

Executives of the National Catholic Liturgical Music Council of Nigeria (NACALIMCON), have been urged to compose guidelines on the use of music at liturgical celebrations for Catholic choirs in Nigeria.

"Compose guidelines on the use of music at liturgical celebrations. A guideline that will encompass what is fitting and what is not fitting in relation to the employment of liturgical music, the comportment of choristers, the use of instruments, the importation of secular melodies into the liturgy, etc."

The Director of Pastoral Affairs Department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Michael Banjo gave the urge while addressing the Executive members of NACALIMCON, during the group's courtesy visit to CSN on Friday, February 9, 2024.

Emphasising on the importance of sacred music in the Church's liturgy, the Church's canonist explained that when music is fittingly employed in the liturgy, worship is greatly enhanced and the very purpose of the liturgy is realised. He appreciated the body specially, for all they do to promote liturgical music in Nigeria.

The Episcopal secretary on Synod and Pilgrimages, Rev Fr. Nicholas Djebah, appealed to the Church's music vanguards to translate the hymn for the 2025 Jubilee Year into various languages so that people can participate actively. He called on them to enforce their policies and reinvigorate that sense of liturgical decorum on choristers during worship.

The National Deputy Chaplain of NACALIMCON, Rev. Fr. George Shenge, noted that there is a serious need for choristers to be guided properly, because they are breaking away from the norms and values of the Catholic music, and observed that the sensitization should begin with the choir leaders who will in turn pass it on to others.

On her part, the National Adviser of NACALIMCON, Rev. Sr. Trinitas Keke, DDL, expressed satisfaction with the effort of the



pastoral affairs department and their interest in the progress of liturgical music. She decried the level at which young choristers have been influenced by the worldly trend in music, and also appealed for sensitization for even some priests who are carried away by pentecostalism, so that they can pass it on to their choirs. She expressed the council's willingness to assist the CSN with the seminar and sensitization exercise if call upon.

In his vote of thanks, the Episcopal Secretary for the Laity, Mr. Joseph Ishu, disclosed that the meeting has exposed to all, the duties of CSN to the church. He thanked the council for their fraternity, and pledged the Secretariat's support to them in all their undertakings. He also advised that concerning their proposed guidelines, they should put all in place to get the CSN stamp on it, so that it will not be taken for granted.

PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

2024 Holy Childhood National Day



**Director,
Pontifical Mission Societies
Rev. Fr. Solomon Zaku**

By Peter Oluwasanmi ADUBI

Reflecting on the theme ‘Together we share our faith,’ children of the Holy Childhood Association (HCA) on Sunday, January 28th, celebrated their 2024 National Day.

The day which was observed by the various dioceses in Nigeria was geared towards celebrating the children and raising funds for the Holy Childhood Association.

At the national office of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), celebration commenced with the Holy Mass celebrated by the Catholic Bishop of Uyo, Most Rev. John Ayah at the St. Gabriel Chaplaincy, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN).

In his homily, the Chief Celebrant at the Mass, encouraged parents to bring up their children in the way of God so that their children may emulate them and become true missionaries for Christ.

The PMS National Director, Rev. Fr. Solomon Zaku explained to the congregation the important role HCA plays in the lives of our Children and encouraged parents to allow their children to become missionaries and witnesses to one another by joining the Holy Childhood Association.

At the Mass, the children participated actively as choristers, lectors, church ushers, Mass servers etc. Also, ten of the children were enrolled into the Pontifical Mission Society for the Holy Childhood during the Mass.



PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES



World Mission Sunday: ‘Everyone has a right to receive the gospel’ – *Bishop Kundi*

The Catholic Bishop of Kafanchan Diocese, Most Rev. Julius Kundi, has emphasized that the mission of spreading the good news of Christ who brings truth, love and freedom particularly to those enslaved must be sustained with much enthusiasm because everyone has the right to receive the gospel.

Bishop Kundi emphasised during his homily at the Mass commemorating the World Mission Sunday, by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), at the St. Gabriel Chaplaincy, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Abuja on Sunday, October 22, 2023.

Reflecting on the theme of the day: ‘hearts on fire, feet on the move,’ the celebrant, noted that the day’s celebration is intended to ignite in all, the zeal and urgency of the Church’s missionary activity of proclaiming the risen Lord based on their personal experiences of him just like the two brothers on their way to Emmaus.

“Each one of us has a part to play in igniting God’s love. Let us set out again with burning hearts, with our eyes open and our feet in motion. Let us set out to make other hearts burn with the word of God and all its richness. This is a duty that must be carried out.”

The Bishop who described the Pope’s message for the mission Sunday as simple and clear, explained that having known Jesus through the Scriptures and the Eucharist, Christians should be filled with much enthusiasm and courage to joyfully share the gospel in solidarity with their brothers and sisters who are still living in poverty,

violence and oppression.

“Here we see how he connects the missionary call of every disciple and the gift of Jesus present in the Eucharist, to be the central message of this year’s World Mission Sunday.

To teach more on the impact of the Eucharist in Evangelization, Pope Francis quoted Pope Benedict XVI who once remarked that for us to communicate the love of God to the world effectively, and succeed in bringing people to encounter Christ and believe in him, the Eucharist should not only be regarded as the source and summit of the life of the church, but also the source and summit of her mission.

“This is absolutely true because Pope Francis believes and expresses that there is no doubt, a person who has truly encountered the risen Lord necessarily will be set on fire with enthusiasm to tell everyone about him.

“Indeed our mission today is clear. More than ever, our human family, “wounded by so many situations of injustice, so many divisions and wars, is in need of the good news of peace and salvation in Christ,” he explained.

The National Director of PMS, Fr. Solomon Zaku, in an exclusive chat with CSN Media after the Mass, disclosed that Mission Sunday is a special day for prayers and support for the mission, because the work and support of the mission involves all Christians, who by virtue of baptism, are missionaries.

PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

‘Develop contemporary approaches to mission work,’ Fr. Samjumi charges PMS coordinators

...as PMS Coordinators meet

Addressing diocesan and national coordinators of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), during the 2024 joint coordinators meeting at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Resource Centre in Abuja, the Secretary General of CSN, Rev. Fr. Zachariah Nyantiso Samjumi called on all the coordinators of the different mission societies to innovate contemporary approaches to the work of the mission. He urged them to go beyond the regular practices and adopt new ways of bringing to life the work of the mission.

The joint coordinators meeting with the theme: “Spiritual Cooperation”, commenced with an Opening Mass celebrated by the National Director of PMS, Rev. Fr. Solomon Zaku on Wednesday, January 24th at the St. Gabriel Chaplaincy in CSN. It witnessed the gathering of diocesan coordinators of the Propagation of Faith (POF), Holy Childhood Association (HCA) and the St. Peter the Apostle (SPA).

In his goodwill message at the opening ceremony, the National Director of Social Communications, CSN, Rev. Fr. Michael Umoh, reiterated that as mission workers and evangelisers, the coordinators should seek new ways to pass on the old message. He acknowledged and thanked the PMS Director for his collaboration with the Communications office over the years.

Reflecting on the theme for the forthcoming World Communications Day (WCD) and the Communications Week (ComWEEK); “Artificial Intelligence and Wisdom of the Heart: For a Fully Human Communication,” the Communications Director, disclosed that the theme is very relevant to them as PMS Coordinators and primary agents of evangelisation. He explained that the Artificial Intelligence (AI) is very instructive and speaks volume about their work as missionaries and called for synergy and collaboration from the PMS with the Communications office during the celebration



of the 2024 ComWEEK and WCD in May, 2024.

The CBCN Secretary, Synod and Pilgrimages, Fr. Nicholas Djebah, sized the opportunity to introduce the PMS Directors to the different pilgrimage packages available for the year and encouraged them to seek ways of participating.

The National Director of PMS, Fr. Solomon Zaku in his welcome address to the coordinators, challenged them to continue with the work of the mission despite the harsh economic situation. He charged the new coordinators among them, to use the meeting as an eye opener on their responsibilities as mission coordinators.



MISSION AND DIALOGUE DEPARTMENT

Owerri Archdiocese hosts 5th National Mission Congress

The 5th edition of the National Mission Congress (NAMICON5), which held from October 25 to Friday October 27, 2023, was hosted by the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri, Imo State, with the theme: "Fear not for I am with you" Isaiah 41:10, at the Maria Assumpta Cathedral in Owerri.

The Congress started with an Opening Mass celebrated by the Emeritus Archbishop of Owerri, Most Rev. Anthony Obinna alongside other bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful.

The Chief Celebrant at the Mass, in his homily, admonished all Christians to remember that they have been chosen and consecrated by our Lord Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the world through their work as missionaries.

"As Christians, we have been called and consecrated by our Lord Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the world in the work of the mission, because it is God's will that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

"The mission is not ours, but God's mission, so we should count ourselves privileged to be specially chosen for this service. We, as missionaries work in the context as Angels of hope, to give hope to the world, because there is no peace, absolutely no peace on earth," he admonished.

While encouraging all to constantly put their faith and hope in God irrespective of the various challenges in the work of evangelisation, the Emeritus Metropolitan of Owerri Province advised that Christians should understand that those who hope in men, will stumble



Director,
Mission and Dialogue
Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomhwange, SMA

and fall, but those who hope in God, will have their strength renewed, because God is never tired, and he is ever faithful.

At the Opening ceremony after the Mass at the Jubilee Hall of the Maria Assumpta Cathedral, the Archbishop of Owerri, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji, who was represented by the Auxiliary Bishop, Most Rev. Moses Chikwe, welcomed all the bishops, priests, religious and delegates to Owerri.

Bishop Chikwe while reflecting on the theme of the Congress, disclosed that considering the times and the situation in the country currently, which is characterised by economic instability, insecurity and corruption, that we are called to stand up courageously as missionaries



MISSION AND DIALOGUE DEPARTMENT



Rev. Fr. Lawrence Emehel

and confront these fears.

He fervently prayed and hoped that the Congress will invigorate in all the participants the strength to become more empowered for their work as ambassadors of Christ on earth.

The Episcopal Chairman, Mission and Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev. Stephen Mamza, in his keynote address, emphasised that the theme for the Congress, is very timely, because most Christians now, are afraid of suffering and death owing to the pandemic that create global and local health crises.

“We have chosen this theme at a time when so many are afraid of suffering and death from pandering that create global and local health crises, afraid of the challenges and uncertainties resulting from climate change, banditry, kidnapping, social inequality and cracks in national and global society that breeds suspicion, political divisions and instability”

Bishop Mamza who is also the Co-Chairman of the National Missionary Council of Nigeria, explained that to illuminate and inspire a collective missionary experience, believers should develop a sense of resilience in times of personal adversity, so as to be able to cultivate and nurture the feeling of compassion and empathy for those who are suffering and are marginalised.

Admonishing that in times of fear and uncertainty, hope becomes the only beacon of light, Bishop Mamza emphasised that the message: ‘I am with you,’ carries the promise of hope that can sustain us through the darkest hour, and embodies a promise of divine presence, guidance and protection.

The Executive Governor of Imo State, Sen. Hope Uzodimma, in his speech, appealed to the church to collaborate through prayers and wise counsel, with the government to enhance effective service delivery to the citizenry.

The Congress which started with the arrival of delegates on Tuesday, October 24, 2023, and will ended with a closing Mass on Friday October 27, and it witnessed Eucharistic adoration and Holy Mass, Talks and Paper presentations, questions and answers alongside other activities.



CSN: Mission and Dialogue, Pastoral Affairs to hold first-ever Bible quiz competition for Catholics in Nigeria

The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria through the Department of Mission and Dialogue and the Catechesis and Biblical Apostolate unit of the Pastoral Affairs Department in conjunction with the Voice of Evangelism International is set to organize a Bible Quiz Competition for Catholics in Nigeria.

The proposed catechetical education programme is designed to take place at three levels. At the diocesan level, the exercise is slated for April 1st to 10th April, the Provincial level follows from May 1st to 10th and at the National/Grand finale for June 27th, 2024.

Similarly, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)

had earlier on, organized her maiden edition of the National Bible Quiz Competition in conjunction with the Voice of the Evangelism International. Being the first of its kind, the Quiz was in three (3) categories; Adult, Youth and Teenage with participants drawn from the 5 Blocs of CAN.

At the grand finale of the competition which took place on September 20th, 2023 at the National Ecumenical Centre, Abuja, the CSN Bloc took 3rd position in the Adult and Youth categories and 4th position in the teenage category.

MISSION AND DIALOGUE DEPARTMENT

Anglican- Roman Catholic Commission holds 2024 meeting in Rome



Roman Catholic Bishops and Anglican Bishops from across the world at the Meeting.

The International Anglican- Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) held her 2024 Meeting at the Vatican City in Rome, from January 22 – 29, 2024 with the theme “Growing Together.”

The meeting which was very significant as it took place during the CAN Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, had in attendance the Episcopal Chairman, Ecumenism Unit of the Department of Mission and Dialogue, Most Rev Michael APOCHI alongside about 50 other Bishops from

the Roman Catholic and Anglican Church from all over the world.

The gathering was a week of Prayer, Pilgrimage and Ecumenical discussions and was very instrumental in enriching the Local Ecumenical relations here in Nigeria under the auspices of Nigeria Anglican- Roman Catholic Commission (NARCC).

IARCCUM is a Commission established in 2021 by the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church as an official joint Commission.

Mission and Dialogue department set for 2024 Mission orientation course, Seminary visitation

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) through the Department of Mission and Dialogue will be organizing an Orientation Course programme for Priests and Religious going outside their culture as Missionaries and Students.

The programme which is slated to hold from June 11 to 17, 2024, hopes to explore areas of Understanding of Mission today (global contexts and contemporary situations), the challenges of non-violent Gospel in contemporary Mission, leadership and use of power in Mission, Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents on Mission and lots more.

Also, the Department as part of her annual program of Seminary visitation will visit St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi and All Saints Major Seminary, Uhiele Ekpoma. These visits are scheduled to take place from March 19-21 and April 16 – 18, 2024, respectively.

As mandated by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), the visit will create a platform for sharing and interaction between the Seminarians, Formators, the entire Seminary community and the CBCN through the

CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA
Department of Mission and Dialogue

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria is organizing:

MISSION 20 ORIENTATION 24

For Priests and Religious going outside their own cultures as Missionaries and students. **777 NIGERIAN MISSIONARIES**

ABUJA

Some of the topics/areas that will be explored are as follows:

- Understanding of Mission Today (Global context & Contemporary situations)
- The Process of Transition
- Inculturated & Evangelization of Cultures
- The Challenges of Non-Violent Gospel in Contemporary Mission
- Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents on Mission
- Introduction to Contemporary Islam
- Inter-Religious Dialogue as a tool for Mission Today
- Sexuality, Relationships and Protecting God's children
- Leadership and use of power in Mission
- Peace Building and Conflict Resolution
- Telling my story...

And Many More Practical Challenges facing Nigerian Missionaries to be explored...

11-17 June, 2024

For more information:
08143026007 - Fr Joseph, SMA
09099705589 - Fr Lawrence
08064667086 - Cecilia

department of Mission and Dialogue on the concerns of Mission, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. It will also be an avenue to get feedback about their work in the Department and the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria in general.

CSN new staff

Profile of Rev. Fr. Augustine Akhogba



Born: August 14, 1976 in Uromi, Nigeria

Seminary Formation: St. John of the Cross Spiritual Year, Ekpoma, Edo State (1995-1996); Seminary of All Saints, Ekpoma, Edo State (1996-2004)

Ordained: September 18, 2004 for Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City (incardinated into Catholic Diocese of Uromi on February 25, 2006)

Assignments:

- a. Benin City Archdiocese / Uromi Diocese
- *Assistant Priest, St. Anthony Pro-Cathedral, Uromi (2004 – 2005)
- *Assistant Priest, St. Denis Catholic Church, Ugboha (2005 – 2006)
- *Personal Secretary to the Bishop of Uromi (2006 – 2007)
- *Lecturer, Institute of Theological Studies (I.T.S), Diocese of Uromi (2012 – 2023)
- *Priest-in-Charge, St. Matthew Catholic Church, Ugbegun (2013 – 2018)
- *Part-time Lecturer, Seminary of All Saints, Uhiele-Ekpoma (2013 – 2023)
- *Diocesan Coordinator, Family and Human Life Unit, Diocese of Uromi (2015 – 2023)
- *Administrator, St. Gabriel Special Education Centre, Ugbegun (2015 – 2018)
- *Member, Uromi Diocesan Curia (2015 – 2023)
- *Lecturer, School of the Faith and Leadership, Archdiocese of Benin City (2016 – 2017)
- *Priest-in-Charge, St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Efandion-Uromi (2018 – 2022)
- *Chaplain, Holy Family Society, Diocese of Uromi (2018 – 2023)
- *Rector, Institute of Theological Studies (I.T.S), Diocese of Uromi (2019 – 2023)
- *Parish Priest, Stella Maris Catholic Church, Iruekpen, Edo State (2022 – 2023)

Profile of Rev Fr. Gordian Boniface Otu



Born: 3rd September, 1970.

• Seminary formation: St Joseph Ikot Ekpene, Pontifical Urban University Rome, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

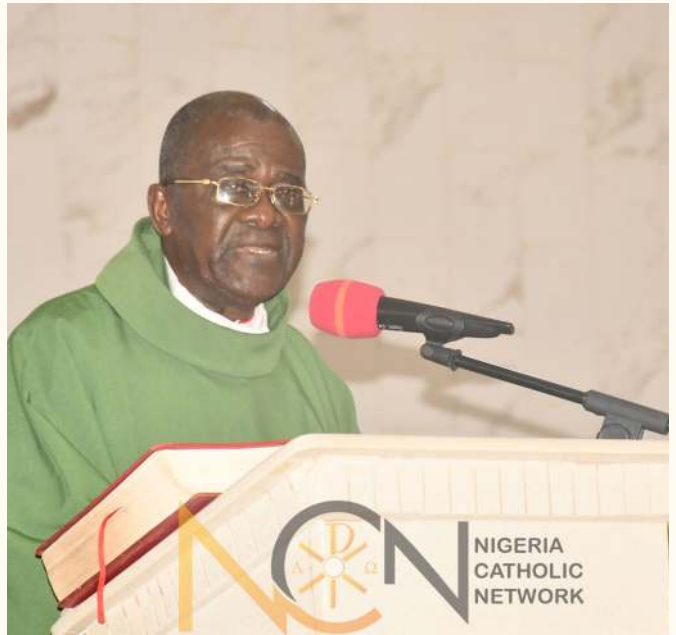
• Ordained: 12th April 1997 for the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene.

• Assignments: Assistant Parish priest Regina Pacis, Forly Italy from 1997- 200. Director of Spiritual Year Seminary from 2001- 2009. Part time Lecturer, St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene 2009- 2012. Diocesan Chancellor, Ikot Ekpene Diocese from 2010-2023. Coordinator, Eye-fan project, Ikot Ekpene Diocese, Missionary of Mercy, appointed by Pope Francis for the year of Mercy. Director, National Catholic Service Center (NCSC), Lagos, 2023 to date.



**Rev. Fr. Dominic Umo
CBCN Secretary on
Education**

Photo speaks from the 2024 CSN Staff Retreat





The Pontifical Mission Societies rejoices with the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria on their first 2024 Plenary.

Wishing you a fruitful deliberations.



Rev. Fr. Solomon Patrick Zaku
PMS National Director