Youth: The today & tomorrow of the Church

HOLISTIC FORMATION
Key to our Success

- Bishop Adesina takes over Ijebu-Ode Diocese
- Bishop Olawoore now incharge of Ilorin Diocese
- Port Harcourt gets first indigenous Bishop
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1. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, GCON, PDP Presidential Candidate
2. President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR of the All Peoples Congress (APC)
3. Msgr. Patrick Eluke, Auxiliary Bishop-elect of Port Harcourt Diocese
4. Msgr. Francis Obafemi Adesina Bishop - elect of Ijebu-Ode Diocese
5. Group photograph of Nigerian Youths at the 2019 World Youth Day in Panama

EDITORIAL/PRODUCTION TEAM

Publisher - Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)
Editor-in-Chief - Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi (CSN Secretary General)
Editor - Rev. Fr. Chris N. Anyanwu
Deputy Editor - Otunba JideFadugba-Phinheiro

Reporters
Lucy Arogundade (Mrs)
Steve Ofurum

Secretary
Fidelia Angbalaga

Production Officer
Emmanuel Eko

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

CONTACT:
Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN)
Plot 459, Cadastral Zone B2, Southern Parkway, Durumi, Abuja
Lagos Office: 6, Force Road, Opp. Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos.
OFFICERS OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA, (CBCN)

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The Word of God is Alive!
Abeokuta Diocese: “Strategies to Overcome our Challenges”

Abeokuta Diocese, the host diocese for the 2019 Second Plenary of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), holding from September 11 to 20; is indeed a diocese basking in the glory of God, spiritually and pastorally. Though a relatively young diocese in terms of years of existence, she has made tremendous progress in terms of evangelization and reaching out with the Good News of Christ; as well as in terms of structural development and provision of facilities and amenities for the common good of the people of Egba and Egbado areas of Ogun State, which constitute the diocese. The diocese is hosting the Catholic Church hierarchy in the country for the first time, on behalf of the Lagos Ecclesiastical Province. In the interview with the Local Ordinary of the diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Kayode Odetoynbo, and other key functionaries of the Church, the CSN News magazine crew found out that in just two decades of existence as a Sufragian, Abeokuta Diocese has taken giant strides in all areas of activities, and the achievements on ground confirm that Christ is indeed with His Church in this land of Egba and Egbado people of the Yoruba race. In deed the grace of God has been the strength of the diocese as disclosed by Bishop Odetoynbo, who revealed that they have evolved strategies to overcome the Challenges of the diocese. Turn to our special focus interview on the diocese titled: On-Going Formation for Holistic Development, Key to Our Success Story.

SECAM at 50: Counting the Blessings

Uganda, the home of the 22 African Martyrs, recently hosted over 300 African Archbishops and Bishops and other delegates from different parts of the world for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). It was a memorable remembrance as the association officially inaugurated on July 29, 1969 at Lubaga Cathedral, Uganda, by Saint Pope Paul VI; has gone in realizing the set objectives. It was also a celebration to recall the progress of the Church of Christ on the continent, guided by the continental body of the Church hierarchy in Africa. Without doubt, the Church in Africa has made tremendous progress in her evangelization apostolate, under the collaborative efforts of the various Bishops’ Conferences that constitute SECAM. The success story of SECAM is validated in the fact that, Africa, the one-time missionary continent now sends missionaries to the European nations that brought Christ to them. Read the story of this invaluable celebration in this edition under the title: SECAM at 50: Counting the Blessings, Invigorating the Faith.

RECOWA’S 3RD Plenary

The Bishops of the Regional Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (RECOWA) met in Ouagadougou Burkina Faso from the 13th to 20th May 2019 for their third Plenary Meeting. It was a memorable gathering of the leaders of the Church in the sub-region; and many far reaching decisions were taken on how to take the Church of Christ to greater heights. Also, at the meeting, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama; Co-adjutor Archbishop of Abuja and Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese was reappointed the President of the body for a second term tenure. Read more in our Story titled: RECOWA 3RD Plenary: Fighting the Cause of the “Tomorrow” of the World in the sub-Region

The Youth as the Future of the Church

After the October 2018 special Synod of Bishops on the Youths and Vocation Discernment, held at the Vatican, the Holy Father Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exultation, subsequent to the report of the synod fathers. The Holy Father’s message titled: Christus Vivit re-emphasized the importance and relevance of youths as the future of the Church nay the nations of the world; and the need to let them have a say and play an effective role in the mission of the Church, in the world, especially among their peers. In the document, Pope Francis outlined the invaluable roles of the youth in the life of the Church and the need for the Church to give them a listening ear. Our story in this respect is titled: Catholic Youths; The Today and Tomorrow of the Universal Church.

YCS hosts the world

From 30th August to 11th September, the Catholic Youth Student hosted the 16th International Conference of the body in Abuja. This is a plus mark for the youths of the church in Nigeria. Read more about this memorable hosting inside this edition.

Ijebu-Ode Diocese Agog for new Local Ordinary

The Clergy, Religious and lay faithful of Ijebu-Ode Diocese on Thursday, April 25th, 2019; hosted dignitaries from different parts of the world and the country on the occasion of the Episcopal Ordination and installation of their new Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Francis Obafemi Adesina. He is the third Bishop of the Diocese. Bishop Adesina succeeds the former incumbent who guided Christ’s flock in the diocese for about three decades; Most Rev. Albert Ayinde Fasina, now Emeritus of the diocese. It was a colourful ceremony; and the third of such in the 50 years history of the diocese. Our story on this memorable day is titled: Change of Shepherdship Baton in Ijebu-Ode Diocese.

Bishop Olawore Takes possession of Ilorin Diocese

In the same vein, the faithful of Ilorin Diocese rolled out the drums to rejoice with their Coadjutor Bishop, Most Rev. Paul Olawoore as he took canonical possession of the diocese as the new Chief Shepherd. The ceremony took place in Ilorin on 13th July 2019. He takes over from Most Rev. Ayo Maria Atoyebi OP; the former Local Ordinary, who retired after reaching the Church’s canonical age for retirement of Catholic Bishops. Read more inside this edition.

Port Harcourt gets First Indigenous Bishop

History was made in the life of the Church in Port Harcourt Diocese, when on Thursday, May 9, 2019; the Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Camillus Etoke Udoh led the faithful of the diocese in a memorable celebration of the Episcopal ordination of Most Rev. Patrick Eluke as the Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese. It was indeed a prayer answered as the faithful celebrated and appreciated the Church for raising one of their own to the Episcopate. Our Story on this ceremony is titled: Port Harcourt Diocese rolls out Red Carpet for First Indigenous Bishop

Celebrations Galore

Since our last publication, It has been anniversaries
celebrations galore of erection of Ecclesiastical Provinces, episcopal and priestly ordinations and birthdays. Prominent among these are: John Cardinal Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, who celebrated the Golden jubilee of his priestly ordination as well as the silver jubilee of the creation of Abuja Archdiocese; the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Owerri and Calabar which celebrated the silver jubilee of their erections as Ecclesiastical Provinces. The Catholic Archbishop of Lagos, Most Rev. Alfred Adeewale Martins turned 60 while some Priests celebrated the anniversaries of their priestly ordinations and birthdays. The stories of these memorable events are reported in our Celebration column.

Two Bishop Emeriti, One Common Factor
The former Catholic Bishops of Ijebu-Ode and Ilorin Dioceses, Most Rev. Albert Ayinde Fasina and Ayo Maria Atoyebi OP, respectively, are men of God with some factors of life in common. They are both devotees of the Blessed Virgin Mary and their love for the Mother of Christ is unquenchable and their exemplary lives of simplicity, humility, love and piety have impacted positively on the growth of the Catholic faith in their dioceses. What is more, they both, till their retirement; led the flock of Christ in Moslem dominated areas for more than two decades and retired in the same year, having reached and passed the Church’s canonical age of 75. The journey of these two men of God as shepherds of Christ flock is an embodiment of love, piety and holiness, worthy of emulation. Turn to page …… For more.

Extraordinary Mission Month Celebration
In conformity with the directive of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, the Church in Nigeria has joined the Universal Church make this year’s Mission Sunday, a special one with the observation of the entire month as Extraordinary Mission Month of October 2019. The celebration has started with activities in different parts of the world, including Nigeria. It will culminate in this Year’s Mission Sunday in October with the celebration of the Mass and the Mission Sunday collection all over the world.

Activities put in place include international, continental and national discussions and orientation programmes. Read more on page ……..

World Communications Day
This year’s World Communications Sunday has come and gone; but its celebration in Nigeria was very unique, with over ninety percent of the Diocesan Communications offices in the country organizing one programme or more to celebrate the day; as if it was a competition. It is indeed a very good sign of the communication apostolate of the Church taking a new dimension in versatility and dynamism. In this edition, we bring you reports of how some of the Archdioceses and dioceses celebrated the 2019 WCD under the title: 2019 World Communications Day: A Year of unique Celebration.

And our Regulars
As usual, we also have for your reading our regular columns; featuring the various activities of all the departments of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) and other agencies of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); news from the Archdioceses and dioceses, under the column, From the Church in Nigeria, as well as news about the Church in the Diaspora and the Vatican; and many more informative stories of the apostolate of the Church.

It is your vintage magazine on the Catholic Church, within and outside Nigeria. You cannot afford to miss this particular edition. We wish you happy reading.

Thank you. God bless you.

Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu
Editor
Social Impact Investing

In my, about twenty-five years as a Catholic priest, without being modest, I can say I have seen the challenges of being a shepherd of souls. I have worked for and with the people of God of varying cultural, social and economic backgrounds; from Nigeria to Europe and America. I have experienced that many of the people who recourse to the parish office to see their priest, often do so, not so much to seek spiritual solutions to their problems, but more often than not, to seek solutions to their social and economic challenges. Very often I have grumbled, simply because all of us expect our parishioners to come when they have spiritual challenges. Perhaps, rather than grumble, pastors of souls, and indeed, the Church need to accept something; we need to like Eli, move away from the usual approach. When the young Samuel, twice disturbed the sleep of his master, Eli discerned that the boy was encountering something unusual and needed an unusual approach. He, therefore, coached Samuel on how to respond to the unusual (cf. 1 Sam. 3:1-10).

The Church professes to share in the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties, of the men and women of our contemporary society. The reality is that majority of Nigerians are today impoverished, humiliated, distressed and abused.

The men and women of our society want to be free from infra dig living conditions which condemns them to a marginal existence. This reflection calls for a critical reappraisal of the prophetic role of the Church against the backdrop of a distressed socio-political and economic environment. In the prevailing circumstance, we need a Church that is prophetic both in words and in deeds. We need a prophetic Church that will discern the current situation in our Country and approach it in an “elicit” manner. The Good News of Jesus Christ is to be preached to a people who have lost almost completely their national pride.

The salvation which the Christian Church proclaims should be more than theological rhetoric and speculations. In a country where poverty has disfigured the lives of millions of God’s people, Christianity can no longer be content with merely giving alms. We must show people the way to respond to life situations. Service and effective amelioration of the condition of our people must remain the true purpose and mission of Christianity. Lumen Gentium advises that the Church must read the signs of times and make sure she is actively engaged with the world (LG, 4). The aim is to create positive social impact in our world.

What we urgently need now is Social Impact Investing. According to the Holy Father, “impact investors are those who are conscious of the existence of serious unjust situations, instances of profound social inequality and unacceptable conditions of poverty affecting communities and entire people.” Investments of this sort are meant to have positive social repercussions on local communities, such as the creation of jobs, access to energy, training, and increased agriculture productivity. Social enterprises differ from charities/social ministries in their financial sustainability and ability to access investment capital. Impact investing is placing money in social enterprises that intentionally create positive social benefit and financial return. In his address to the participants in the conference promoted by the Pontifical Council for justice and peace on “Impact Investing for the poor”, Pope Francis describes Impact Investing as “a form of investment which can benefit local communities and the environment, as well as providing a reasonable return.” Financial returns for investors tend to be more moderate than in other types of investments; It is aimed at satisfying basic needs associated with agriculture, access to water, adequate housing at reasonable prices, as well as primary health care and educational services.

In the area of education, the Catholic Church in Nigeria is not a stranger to Social Impact Investing. Same could be said in the area of healthcare even though we still have grounds to cover. It appears that is time, for the Church to make solid socio-economic impacts like having orchards with fruit-producing trees; something that would uplift positively the social and economic status of both the people, the environment, and investors.

At the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOWA), the Dicastery of Integral Human Development in Rome, which is headed by Peter Cardinal Turkson of Ghana, raised the consciousness of RECOWA to the development needs of Africa, and particularly, the West African Region; here we are bedevilled by the challenges of insecurity triggered by Boko Haram and other known and unknown cooperating factors, herder-farmer conflicts; this is unconnected with climate change and the resultant desertification of the Sahel region, which is causing the herdsmen to migrate southwards towards the Atlantic Ocean – a movement that is causing devastating conflicts between herdsmen and farmers.

All these and many more are challenges for the government and by now it is clearer that government alone cannot deal with it. The Church must be seen to be actively involved in the picture of solution-seeking.

As a Church, it is not enough to be self-reliant. She must also impact the lives of the communities not only spiritually, but also socially, economically, and environmentally. Unless the people can, at least, attain to some degree, the basic human needs, preaching the Word of God to them would serve as opium. This is what all those who speak or claim to speak in the name of God must avoid. As you go through this write-up, I invite you to be more actively involved in making concrete resolutions that will help us pursue the vision we have for the Church’s mission with passion. If communities, districts, parishes, and dioceses could increase in their endeavour for Social Impact Investing, our people and our Church communities would be better for it.
CSN PLATFORM

2019 BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE FIRST PLENARY IN PICTURES

The bishops outside the Chaplaincy Chapel as the President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, prays and blesses the Chapel.

CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze assisted by the priests dedicating the Altar.

Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, praying and blessing the Chapel.

Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi (left) and John Cardinal Onaiyekan praying inside the Chapel.

CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze cutting the tape to declare the Church open.

Cross section of the Bishops on the Altar, during the celebration of the Mass.

The donor of the Church High Chief Obiora Okonkwo (right) speaking at the opening ceremony of the Chapel.

The new St Gabriel Chaplaincy Chapel.
A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi, Abuja, 10 - 16 March 2019

1. **PREAMBLE**

We, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, held our First Plenary Meeting for the year at the Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi, Abuja, 10 - 16 March 2019. Having prayerfully reflected on issues affecting the Church and our Country, we now issue this Communiqué.

2. **LENT, A SEASON OF NEW BEGINNINGS**

The Holy Season of Lent affords us an added opportunity to pray, to fast and to enhance Christian charity. As we sincerely seek the face of God, let us be steadfast in cultivating those virtues of decency and moral uprightness that will enhance the peace, the unity and the well-being of the whole nation. With the Holy Father, Pope Francis, we pray that the Holy Season of Lent teach us again how to live as children of God, redeemed, led by the Holy Spirit and capable of acknowledging and obeying God’s law written in our hearts.

3. **GOVERNANCE AND THE COMMON GOOD**

The Church in her Social Teaching describes the Common Good as the “sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily”. The pursuit of this good must be based on the respect for the sanctity and dignity of human life and the equality of all people. The Common Good presupposes respect for the human person and requires the social well-being and development of the group itself. Governance worth its name is only possible where there is true justice, equality and peace. It demands virtues, such as, patience, modesty, moderation, charity and efforts to share. In governing, leaders have to focus on the Common Good and ensure that the people and their aspirations, both individual and collective, assume paramount importance. As a matter of justice not charity, political governance has to pay particular attention to the provision of basic amenities, making sound policies and showing concern for the underprivileged of the society who are often deprived of the opportunity to participate in their own development. We therefore enjoin government at all levels in Nigeria to put necessary structures of governance in place and enact appropriate laws that will produce such an environment. We equally insist that the democratic culture of the separation of powers and the independence of the Judiciary be respected.

4. **THE CHURCH AS VANGUARD OF GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The Church in her Social Teaching would be inculcated early into children and young people. Social Teaching would be inculcated early into children and young people. For centuries, the Church has been an advocate of good governance for the Common Good. To this end, we call on all dioceses to promote the Social Teaching of the Church, to simplify and to translate it into concrete actions and to use it for an effective socio-political formation of all the people. Special attention must be paid to young people and families so that the values espoused in Catholic Social Teaching would be inculcated early into children and young people.

However, because moral authority is crucial for good governance and transparent accountability, we as a Church commit ourselves to exercise authority based on sound Christian moral principles, truly inspired by the example of Christ and guided by His compassion.

5. **STATE OF THE NATION**

The 2019 General Elections and Our Democracy

The 2019 General Elections have come and gone except in some areas where the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled supplementary elections for specified reasons. We commend our people for the patriotism and the maturity displayed, and the electorate who in some places came out en masse especially during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections to exercise their rights and perform their civic duties. We equally note the voter apathy that characterized the subsequent Governorship and State Houses of Assembly Elections. We believe that this apathy may not have been unconnected with among other things, the violence, malpractice and the unnecessary militarization of the process, all of which contributed to eroding the people’s confidence in the electoral process. We have taken note of those who have been declared winners, and commend the civility of those who rejected the results but have chosen to express their grievances through legitimate means under the law rather than through violence. Whatever the outcome, justice must be seen to have been done. We admonish whoever holds power at the end of the day to remember that power belongs to God and to Him alone. God demands strict accountability for how anyone takes power and uses it, for God cannot be deceived or challenged (Lk 16:2).

Towards a New Political Culture

We affirm that elections are an opportunity for people through the ballot to freely choose those who will serve them. We denounce the unfortunate incident of loss of lives and destruction of property, which is ongoing even now. We however, admonish that elections should not be turned into a battle between warriors fighting to capture power and conquer territory and people at all cost. We observe that many of the challenges that emerged during the electoral process were as a result of inadequate electoral laws, which made implementation problematic and at times offered lacunae for evil minded people to exploit the situation to their own advantage. Even where the rules were clear, they were not always adhered to. One of the reported phenomena during the elections was the crude and reckless use of money...
CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, flanked by Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi (left) and Rev. Fr. Jude Asanbe (right), presiding at the opening Mass for the Plenary inside the newly opened Chapel.

The donor of the Chapel, High Chief Okonkwo and his wife carrying the offertory gifts to the Altar.

Archbishop Akubeze blessing the donor and his wife after bringing the offertory gift to the altar.

Cross section of Bishops and Priests on the Altar, during the celebration of the Mass.

Cross section of Rev. Sisters at the opening Mass.

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

Cross section of Rev. Sisters at the celebration of the Mass.

Group photograph of the Bishops with the donor and his wife at the end of the celebration of the Mass.
to buy votes; showing how desperate politicians and political parties are determined to get political power at all cost. Bad elections do not lead to good governance. We demand that the government acknowledge the inadequacies that characterized the 2019 elections and embark on a course for redress. We urge her to enact, endorse and implement laws and policies that will ensure free, fair and credible elections in the future.

Promoting Good Governance: a Duty for All
We enjoin all Nigerians, leaders and the led, to abide by democratic principles such as respect for human life, human rights and the rule of law. We also encourage the electorate to ensure that those who hold public offices in our country are held accountable. We equally urge all Nigerians to eschew all forms of indiscipline and corruption and be resolute rather than lose hope in our struggle for a better future and nation.

6. RECENT KILLINGS IN KADUNA AND OTHER STATES
We have received with deep sorrow, the tragic news of the resurgence of further horrific killings in some parts of Kaduna State, Taraba, Benue, Kogi, Edo, Rivers, Zamfara, Adamawa and other states. Against the backdrop of the violence and bloodshed that characterized the last elections, we are pained that the culture of death is becoming embedded into our daily lives. This persistent devaluation of human life and property poses an existential threat to our personal survival and that of our nation. How can government continue to appear helpless in the face of such shameful tragedy? We strongly appeal to the President, in collaboration with the Governors of Kaduna State and other affected States to seriously take steps to arrest this drift before total anarchy and mayhem consume the entire nation.

7. EVENTS IN THE CHURCH
Events in the Local Church
We are grateful to God and to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for appointing Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, formerly the Metropolitan Archbishop of Jos as the Coadjutor Archbishop of Abuja. Archbishop Kaigama remains the Apostolic Administrator of Jos. We congratulate His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan for this new development. We felicitate with Most Rev. Albert Ayinde Fasina on his happy retirement as Bishop of Ijebu-Ode Diocese. We wish Bishop Fasina a rewarding retirement. We thank God and the Holy Father for the appointment of Rt. Rev. Msgr. Francis Adesina to the Episcopal See of Ijebu-Ode. His Episcopal Ordination comes up on the 25 April 2019. The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria continue to thank God and the Holy Father for the appointment of Rt. Rev. Msgr. Patrick Eluke as the Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese. We rejoice with His Lordship, Most. Rev. Camillus Etokudoh and the entire Christ’s faithful of Port Harcourt Diocese. The Episcopal ordination of Msgr. Eluke comes up on the 9 May 2019. We recall the happy occasion of the Centenary Celebration of the arrival of the Catholic faith in Kano. We equally thank God for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Canonical Erection of the Dioceses of Ilorin and Ijebu-Ode. We pray for the continued growth of the faith in these dioceses.

Events in the Universal Church
We note that the World Youth Day was celebrated in Panama in January 2019 with many Nigerian youths, bishops and priests participating. We pray that the entire Church in Nigeria continue to lead and encourage the youths to imitate our Mother, Mary, in seeking, discerning and doing the will of God. On another note, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, organized a summit of all the Presidents of Conferences of Bishops on the theme: “Protection of Minors against Sexual Abuse”. As part of our duty of governance as Shepherds of the flock of Christ, we commit ourselves anew to ensuring that minors and vulnerable adults are safe from sexual abuse and offenders are duly prosecuted and given appropriate sanction.

We are happy to announce the 3rd Plenary Assembly of the Regional Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (RECOWA-CERAO), with the theme: “The New Evangelization and the Promotion of Integral Human Development in the Church, Family of God in West Africa”. The Assembly takes place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 13 – 20 May 2019. We equally rejoice with The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), which concludes the yearlong celebration of its Golden Jubilee between 21 and 29 July 2019 in Kampala, Uganda. The theme of the celebration is “Church-Family of God in Africa, Celebrate your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ your Saviour”. May the Jubilee enhance the proclamation of the good news all over the African continent and bring the joy of salvation to the entire people of God.

8. CONCLUSION: BE PRAYERFUL, BE HOPEFUL, REMAIN FOCUSED
We thank God for keeping us together as a nation. As a people we must be prayerful, hopeful and focused as we journey through another four years in our political history. St. Paul admonishes us: “the night is far gone and the day is close at hand, let us cast the works of darkness and put on the armour of light” (Rom 13:12-13). Strengthened by this biblical injunction, let us rededicate ourselves to the power of God’s word in prayer. Our intensive prayer inflames our hearts in faith and keeps our hope alive. We must continue to pray to God to help us rediscover our common humanity, cultivate respect for one another, enthrone transparency and accountability in the use of our common patrimony and imbibe apostolic charity towards the poor and the vulnerable in the Church and society.

May the Almighty and Merciful God through the intercession of our Mother, Mary, Queen and Patroness of Nigeria lead us along the way of truth, love and peace, Amen.

(SIGNED)
Most Rev. Augustine Obiora AKUBEZE
President, CBCN
Archbishop of Benin City

Most Rev. Camillus Raymond UMOH
Secretary, CBCN
Bishop of Ikot-Ekpene
2019 BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE FIRST PLENARY IN PICTURES

Cross section of the Bishops during the opening prayer at the opening ceremony of the Conference.

Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi addressing the bishops and other guests at the opening ceremony.

Archbishop Alfred Martins of Lagos, leading the Bible Enthronement Service.

Archbishop Gabriel Abegunrin of Ibadan (left) and Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, CoAdjutor of Archbishop of Abuja and Apostolic Administrator of Jos at the opening ceremony.

Bishops Charles Hammawa and Paul Olawoore at the opening ceremony.

CBCN Vice President, Bishop Lucius Ugorji flanked by Archbishop Valerian Okeke of Onitsha (left) and Bishop Camillus Umoh of Ikot Ekpene (right); addressing the Bishops during the session.
The Catholic Diocese of Ijebu-Ode, on Thursday, April 25th, 2019 hosted the cream of the Nigerian society and other guests from outside the country, on the occasion of the Episcopal Ordination of Msgr. Francis Obafemi Adesina as the third Local Ordinary of the diocese. He succeeds Most Rev. Albert Ayinde Fasina, who retired on reaching the canonical age required by the Church; after being the Chief Shepherd of the diocese for about 30 years. The consecrating prelate at the ceremony was the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi while the homily was delivered by Most Rev. Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo, the Catholic Bishop of Oyo Diocese.

The ceremony which took place at the grounds of St Anthony’s Nursery and Primary School, Igbegba Road, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State; was attended by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi, Cardinals John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja, Anthony Olubumi Okogie. Emeritus Archbishop of Lagos, and a high powered CBCN delegation led by its President, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze. Also in attendance were dignitaries from all walks of life, government officials, traditional rulers, captains of industries, priests and religious from all parts of the country, Knights of the Church and lay faithful.

In his homily, Bishop Badejo described the position of the Catholic Bishop as one of service to God and humanity, while his appointment is by the power of the Holy Spirit, without the influence of any god father or financial inducements as obtained in the political system. His words: “As has happened in other dioceses before now, the clear knowledge of having been sent, being merely a steward, is the reason why no Catholic Bishop can hand power and authority over to his next of kin, or favourite candidate all by himself, except such an individual be chosen by due Catholic process.”

He continued: “We ordain a Bishop to govern Ijebu Ode diocese today who knows nothing about how he became the Chief Shepherd here. He paid no gubernatorial ticket fees of 40 million naira, had no campaign team and has no Godfather. Yet those who have built up this diocese and been part of the process are all gathered here to ordain him not to position themselves for contracts or patronage but just to promote God’s work. This is purely about service to God and people.”

The homilist described the Catholic way of appointing a shepherd for the faithful of any diocese as “a much needed metaphor for power and leadership in our country Nigeria which should especially be the mantra for all Christians in positions of power, be it in politics, economics, business or even civil service. The church stages this kind of occasions to hopefully transform society for better by it.”

Using the readings of the day, Bishop Badejo outlined the responsibilities of a bishop to God and the faithful, advising the new Bishop-elect not to have any fear as the work he has been given belongs to God who will take total control. He remarked: “My Lord, to be called upon to be a good shepherd in the mound of the Master as we read in the Gospels is to be a model of many virtues. Pope Francis, reflecting on the text of St. Paul’s letter to Titus which describes the qualities and role of a Bishop underlines how a bishop must be a blameless steward or “administrator of God, not of assets, power and cliques. He emphasized that the bishop must be “a humble, meek servant not a prince”. Only thus, he said can the Church set right what needs to be corrected. And as a father, teacher, pastor administrator, liturgist and ruler in the Church, there will always be many things to be corrected.”
Bishop Badejo also used the occasion to remind the priests and religious of the diocese of their vocational commitments. He said: My dear priests and religious of Ijebu Ode diocese, these are truly challenging times for the divine ideals that the Catholic Church holds dear. The vows of priestly commitment especially are under attack from within and from without. We must see all this as an outcry for an authentic priesthood and more coherent service. We must not simply go through these challenges but grow through them. With your cooperation with your new Bishop, the one who has called you will not fail you. This diocese will flourish and blossom as testimony to your fidelity and sacrifice.

His words for the lay faithful of the diocese went thus: “Dear lay people of Ijebu Ode, thank you for your exceptional contribution to the growth of the Church here especially in the sustenance of Christian family life. With the Clergy you gave a good account of yourselves by the way you accepted and welcomed your new Bishop. Your reward is surely great in heaven. I wish only to remind you of what you already know, that the Church is not only of the Clergy, religious nor is it of only the lay faithful. It is of all.”

Also speaking at the ceremony, the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and Archbishop of Benin City Archdiocese, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze reminded the Episcopal hierarchy to remain committed to their obligations to God and the faithful in the discharge of their duties as shepherds of the Church of Christ in the country. According to the Archbishop,: “Christ the good shepherd should be the role model for all of us Bishops. Obedience and support are what the flock of Christ owes us. Respect for sound doctrine and discipline is our obligation to God and his people.”

The CBCN President also used the occasion to advise the new bishop, priests, religious and the lay faithful, especially those of Ijebu-Ode Diocese. While congratulating and welcoming the new bishop to the CBCN, he urged him not to be afraid, noting that the work he has accepted “is challenging and rewarding.” He assured the new local ordinary of the diocese of the support of his brother bishops, stressing: “My Lord, develop a good listening and consultative attitude. Avoid creating an environment where those around you will not be truthful to you. Know that the quality and soundness of your decision will be dependent on the quality and soundness of the information you get.”

The local Ordinary of Benin City Archdiocese commended the pastoral zeal of the retired Local Ordinary of the diocese, Most Rev. Albert Fasina, describing him as “A Shepherd who smells like his sheep”. He called on the priests, religious and lay faithful of the diocese to cooperate and collaborate with their new local ordinary to enhance the spiritual and pastoral growth of the diocese.

‘A child that does not give honour and respect to the elders is likely to falter’. With the above in mind, Most Rev. Francis Adesina decided to pay a courtesy visit to the Mama Onabanjo, the wife of the former Governor of Ogun State, the Mama Ijo of St. Sebastian Cathedral and obviously the oldest Catholic Church in Ijebu land. It was indeed a meeting of the old and the new at the beginning of his Episcopacy. In Mama Onabanjo’s usual way, she prayed for the Bishop and wished him well as he shepherds the flock of God in Ijebu land. She was really elated with the visit and kept on her usual smile and soft words. We look forward to more of such visits by the Bishop acontinues his Episcopacy.
History was made on Thursday, May 9, 2019, in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State; when the faithful of Port Harcourt Diocese hosted dignitaries and other well-wishers from different parts of the country on the Episcopal ordination of their son, Most Rev. Patrick Eluke as the Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese, the first indigene since the erection of the diocese. The ordination which took place at the Corpus Christi Cathedral, Port Harcourt, was presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi, who also preached the homily. He was assisted by the Metropolitan of Calabar Province, Most Rev. Joseph Ekuwem and the Local Ordinary of Port Harcourt Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Camillus Etokudoh.

Present at the ceremony were over 45 members of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) led by its President and Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze; dignitaries from all walks of life, including Dr. Ipalibo Harry, the Deputy Governor of Rivers State who represented his Excellency, Governor Nyesom Wike; former Governor Celestine Omehia and his wife; and the former Chief Judge of the state, Justice PNC Agumagu, among others. Also present were priests, religious, Knights of the Church, lay faithful and representatives of other Christian denominations in the state. The new Bishop is to assist the Local Ordinary of the diocese, Most Rev. Camillus Etokudoh in the administration of the diocese.

Addressing the new Bishop, Archbishop Filipazzi, stated that by his appointment, the Auxiliary Bishop has fully entered the chain of apostles of Christ, a feat for which he said, the faithful of the diocese should be grateful to the Pope who made it possible. He added that the ordination of the first indigenous Bishop of the diocese was not just an exceptional event, but one that is meant to bring peace to the faithful and all the people who live in the city of Port Harcourt, irrespective of their religious, ethnic or political affiliation.

The Nuncio reminded the new Bishop on the need to see himself and his people with the eye of Christ, adding that by seeing the priests, religious and the lay faithful of the diocese with the eye of Christ, the challenges facing the Church in Port Harcourt would be better settled. He declared: “The new Bishop should be one who helps and serves, it is not an honour to be a Bishop, but for service. So he should not be like a judge, who commands and corrects, instead his job is to serve the people.”

Archbishop Filipazzi also used the occasion to call on the bishops of the country to preach peace to their followers; and admonished the lay faithful of the diocese to accept their Auxiliary Bishop as a gift with gratitude by praying for him and supporting him to succeed in his mission. Using the readings of the day, to buttress his point, the Papal Nuncio described Jesus Christ as “the good shepherd who never stopped being the good shepherd to people because of his subordinate nature to the Father”. According to him the human shepherd can never be to themselves independent and absolute owners of the souls entrusted to them but should always be subordinate to the Father and to the Son, Jesus Christ.

The President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, Most. Rev. Dr. Augustine Obiora Akubeze in his own address, stated that Port Harcourt Diocese has by virtue of the ordination of an indigenous Auxiliary Bishop, the first in the 58 years history of the diocese, made ecclesiastical history which should lead to rapid growth in the diocese. He welcomed the new Bishop into the College of Bishops of Nigeria and added that as an auxiliary, he has no See of his own, but he is expected to work according to the pastoral plans of the substantive; Bishop Camillus Etokudoh. Archbishop Akubeze noted that the appointment of a Bishop is not done with sentiments of any kind as only the suitably
qualified persons are recommended to the Holy Father for appointment.

Also speaking at the occasion, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Calabar Province, Most Rev. Joseph Ekuwem said the consecration of Bishop Eluke is the second under his watch as an Archbishop, and that the province aligns herself with the stand of the CBCN and welcomed the new Bishop to the College of Bishops not only at the national level, but also at the Provincial level. He admonished the faithful of the diocese to ensure that the joy that came with the ordination of Bishop Eluke should last for many years to come, especially when the new Bishop fully begins his assignments in the diocese. The host, Most Rev. Camillus Etokudoh had earlier welcomed all the dignitaries to the historical event which he described as a unique and great occasion.

Also speaking at the ceremony, the deputy Governor, Dr. Ipalibo Harry stated that the people and government of the state were grateful to God for the gift of the priest and the appointment and installation of Bishop Eluke as the first Indigenous Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese. While advocating for collaboration between the Church and the state Government to curb youths’ restiveness and “keep them in the ways of the Lord”; the Deputy Governor expressed the optimism that the ordination would also deepen the relationship between the State and the Church.

Expressing his joy and gratitude for the opportunity to serve the Lord in a higher capacity in the Church, Bishop Eluke promised to work with the diocesan Bishop and other brother Bishops with his whole heart for the growth of the Church, especially in the diocese and Nigeria. He also called on the lay faithful to continue to pray for the Bishops, priests and the country.

The Catholic Diocese of Port Harcourt was created on May 16, 1961; while the Auxiliary Bishop was born on March 25, 1967 in Eligbo in Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers. He was ordained a Priest of the Catholic Church on September 23, 1995 and appointed the first Indigenous Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese and Titular Bishop of Fotice, by Pope Francis on February 12, 2019. Most Rev. Dr. Patrick Eluke was until his elevation the Parish Priest of St. Francis Parish, Rumuokwuta, Port Harcourt as well as the Diocesan Vocations Director.
BISHOPS URGE SOCIAL SERVICES AGENTS AND SODALITIES TO BE MORE VIBRANT

The Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ibadan have called on the social services agents and sodalities of the Church in the province to be more-proactive in the discharge of their responsibilities by focusing more on evangelization activities at the grassroots and give “special attention to authentic catechetical formation and witnessing by the faithful”.

The Bishops made the call in the communiqué issued at the end of their provincial; meeting held at the Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Ado Ekiti, from August 5 – 6, 2019. The communiqué was signed by Most Rev. Gabriel Abegunrin of Ibadan Archdiocese and Bishop John Oyejola of Osogbo Diocese, President and Secretary of the conference, respectively.

They noted that in spite of the many challenges faced by in the Church and in the country, as a result of our human frailties; God has been magnanimous in his infinite mercy and by his grace “we have come through them all till the present moment”.

Reiterating their commitment to the task of evangelization in the province, the Bishops declared: “We remain committed to the work of evangelization which is the mission by which the Church is called to propagate the gospel in the whole world for the sanctification and salvation of the people. We are even more determined in the work of evangelization to promote integral human development in our Dioceses through our social-pastoral instruments of engagement.”

They added: “We hereby call on the Justice, Development and Peace Movement, the St. Vincent de Paul society, the Legion of Mary, the Charismatic Renewal Movement and other Church societies to engage more in deliberate evangelization activities at the grassroots and give special attention to authentic catechetical formation and witnessing by the faithful. It is in these challenging times for the faith that the task of evangelization must be even more highlighted in their activities.”

On the challenges facing the youths, the Bishops aligned with the call by the Bishops of the sub-Region Conference (RECOWA-CERAO); that governments should pay more attention and commit more resources to address the problems of the youths. They urged governments of the sub-region to: “pay more attention and commit resources to the development of youths in our sub-region. Providing a conducive environment for growth, good education and employment opportunities especially for the youth will go a long way to reduce crime, illegal migration, human trafficking and suicide which threaten to become a way of life in many countries, including Nigeria. We wholeheartedly endorse this call to all civil and political authorities and exhort policymakers to seriously consider this call.”

Addressing the issue of the family, the Bishops noted: “The authentic development of any society depends on the quality of the families that constitute that society. Good families make good nations. We urge our governments and authorities to promote the traditional human family as a means of reforming our society.”

The added: “Along with the educational and religious institutions, good families have a great potential to curb delinquency and truancy and is a key asset for integral human development. Our society cannot afford to ignore this all important asset.”

The Bishops also spoke on the improvement in the payment of workers salaries and pension by some governments in the country; the renewed commitment to agriculture and the licensing of churches for marriages. They reminded the government and security agencies of the continued menace of the insecurity of lives and properties and called for more proactive measures to combat the situation.
LUKEWARM ATTITUDE OF GOVERNMENT TO NATIONWIDE INSECURITY WORRIES BISHOPS

The Catholic Bishops of Owerri Ecclesiastical Province have condemned in strong terms the present state of insecurity in the country and the lukewarm attitude of the Federal Government and the country’s security agencies at addressing the worrisome situation holistically and in a pragmatic manner that could guarantee safety of life and property of all Nigerians irrespective of their differences.

The concern of the Bishops was expressed in the communiqué issued by the Owerri Ecclesiastical Bishops’ Conference at the end of their second plenary meeting for the year 2019. The communiqué titled: Be Strong! Fear Not!; and signed by Archbishop Anthony J.V Obinna of Owerri and Bishop Augustine Ukwuoma, President and Secretary of the Conference respectively; deliberated on a number of pastoral issues affecting the Ecclesiastical region and the fears, harrowing experiences and general insecurity of life in the country.

According to the Bishops: “Our people are currently undergoing unbearable threats from some of our political leaders and even from our security agents. The situation has been compounded by the marauding, so-called Fulani herdsmen and other bandits. The situation is equally compounded by government’s apparent silence over infringements at various levels and by shady land deals by certain community leaders.”

They continued: “Every day, and across our States, we hear heartbreaking tales of kidnapping, raping, maiming, extorting, land-grabbing, killing and destroying of people’s sources of livelihood. We continue often to hope in vain for our elected public officers and security agents to protect our citizens as expected and as enshrined in our Constitution.”

The Bishops also expressed disdain at the unemployment situation in the country which according to them “is causing grave concern to the society as governments fail to provide jobs and factories they promise, and as so many youths look more for quick money-making ventures even at the cost of their lives and other lives rather than pursue creative, innovative and gainful jobs.”

Other worrisome areas articulated by the Bishops include: Unpaid pensions and gratuities of retired people; building of substandard roads that cause Nigerians untold hardship and trauma; nonchalant attitude of public officers in charge of public utilities facilities, including hospitals, schools and electricity; resulting in the decay and malfunction of these facilities; failure of teachers to impart right quality knowledge in schools and spiritual leaders abandoning their flock to wolves and marauders.

Offering possible solutions to the identified challenges facing the country, the Bishops called on Nigerians not to lose hope and be rest assured in God. Their words: “Our strong faith in God and our reliance upon Him constitute our foremost source of strength as we chart our way forward in the midst of difficulties, possible despondency and resignation. That is why “Even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened, or even attacked …. these are the trials through which we triumph by the power of him who loved us” (Romans 8:35 – 37).

The Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri is made up of the Archdiocese of Owerri and the Dioceses of Umuahia, Orlu, Okigwe, Ahia and Aba.
TAKES CANONICAL POSSESSION OF DIOCESE

ILORIN AGOG AGAIN AS BISHOP OLAWORE TAKES CANONICAL POSSESSION OF DIOCESE

Story by Ade Akinnawonu

Most Rev. Paul Adegboyega Olawore, the Co-Adjutor Bishop of Ilorin Diocese on July 13, 2019; took canonical possession of the diocese and was installed the 4th Bishop of the diocese since its creation, about 50 years ago. The ceremony took place at St. Joseph’s Catholic Cathedral, Taiwo Road Ilorin, Kwara State. The ceremony took place a few months after the diocese hosted dignitaries from all walks of life, including members of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); for his Episcopal ordination as the Co-Adjutor Bishop of the diocese. The ceremony took place following the stepping down of the former Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Ayo-Maria Atoyebi OP, from the position on reaching the Church’s canonical age for retirement; and his retirement accepted by the Holy Father, Pope Francis.


The rite of canonical possession was performed by Archbishop Gabriel Abegunrin, the Metropolitan of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province of which Ilorin Diocese is a suffragan. He was assisted by the Bishop Emeritus, Most Rev. Ayo-Maria Atoyebi OP. As the new bishop occupied his seat ex-CATHEDRA, priests of the diocese pledged their allegiance to him one after the other and were followed by priests working in the diocese. Superiors of Men and Women Religious in the diocese took their turn to pledge their allegiance. The lay faithful lead by the President and Secretary of Diocesan Laity Council also took their turn. This was followed by the presidents and secretaries of Diocesan CMO, CWO, CYON as well as the presidents and secretaries of societies.

In his homily, Most Rev. Peter Odetooyinbo enjoined all Christ faithful of Ilorin Diocese to rejoice and celebrate on the unique occasion. He enjoined the new bishop with the words of St. Boniface that episcopacy is overwhelming and reminded him that the homily of that day was the second after his Episcopal ordination. He added that Bishop Olawore should not trust in his strength but acknowledge God who will make straight his paths. The homilist declared: “You must accept the supremacy and kingship of God, so that all may be well!” He urged the new bishop to keep close association with other Christians and people of other faith. Bishop Odetooyinbo admonished the priests to collaborate with their new Bishop and urged the lay faithful “not be mere spectators” and enjoined all to obey their leaders.

In his short address at the occasion, Most Rev. Gabriel ‘Leke Abegunrin told the faithful to speak about the Church from the position of knowledge and thus should read the Church books, attend workshops and seminars to improve on their knowledge. He encouraged the people to develop reading habits and told them that good books to help them improve are available at Catholic Bookshops with particular reference to St Paul Bookshop Ibadan. The Bishop Emeritus prayed for the new Bishop while he placed him under the maternal care of Mama Maria. He urged the people of God to key into what he called PEW: Prayer, Evangelization and Witness in order to move the diocese to the next level.

The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) was represented by Rev. Fr. Michael Banjo, the Director of Pastoral Affairs; while the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins and the Bishops of Oyo, Ekiti and Kontagora, also sent representatives.

It will be recalled that the Episcopal ordination of Most Rev. Paul Olawore as the Co-Adjutor Bishop of the diocese was performed by the Local Ordinary of Ilorin Diocese, Bishop Ayo-Maria Atoyebi, OP, assisted by Bishops Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo Diocese and Jude Arogundade of Ondo Diocese, as co-consecrators. The homily was delivered by Most Rev. John Oveyola, the Catholic Bishop of Osogbo Diocese who admonished the Coadjutor Bishop to be an exemplary and inspirational leader to the faithful of the diocese so that they can be hardworking, sound, holy and apostolic in their ministry. The Vicar General of Ilorin Diocese, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Afolayan Ajayi presented the Coadjutor elect for consecration, while Very Rev. Fr. Anselm Pendo Lawani read the Papal Bull in English language and Rev. Fr. Michael Femi Ajiboye read it in Yoruba language. Present at the ceremony were: Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi, the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria; John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese; Anthony Cardinal Okogie, emeritus Archbishop of Lagos and 22 other members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).
The faithful of the Catholic Dioceses of Ijebu-Ode and Ilorin, will always sing praises to God for His gift of their dedicated local ordinaries who laboured for more than three decades to ensure the entrenchment of the Catholic Religion in their two dioceses entrenched in Moslem dominated environment.

For the Faithful of Ijebu-Ode Diocese, Most Rev. Albert Ayinde Fasina was a God sent shepherd who left his Muslim background to become a Catholic priest and led the flock of Christ in the Moslem dominated diocese of Ijebu-Ode in Ogun State; for about 30 years. He was the second indigenous bishop of the diocese. He succeeded the first indigenous Bishop, late Most Rev. Anthony Sanusi, in 1990; who was also of Muslim background.

Equally lucky are the faithful of Ilorin Diocese in Kwara State; who found a Christ-like shepherd in their former Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Ayo Maria Atoyebi OP. He led the flock of Christ in the Moslem dominated area of Ilorin for many years. Like his brother bishop, Most Rev. Ayo Maria was the second indigenous Bishop of the diocese, taking over the mantle of leadership from the first indigenous Bishop, Most Rev. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, now Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese and a Prince of the Universal Church.

These two wonderful shepherds of Christ’s flock, during their tenure of the two dioceses were exemplary in holiness, piety and humility and these virtues not only aided them in increasing the flock of Christ in the difficult terrains where they ministered, but also impacted positively on the lives of the faithful as well as other people of different religions living in their ecclesiastical jurisdictions. Apart from their virtuous life, these two emeriti of the Church hierarchy in Nigeria have one thing in common, they are steadfast in their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary to the extent that, they are proud to say their lives, their mission and apostolate depend on the Mother of Christ.

Talking about Bishop Atoyebi's absolute dedication to the cause of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the affiliation of Maria to his first name Ayo speaks volume; and the way he constantly and devotedly mentioned the name of the Blessed Mother clearly indicates his unalloyed commitment to the motherhood of the Lord Jesus. Going down memory lane, one remembers the homily of Bishop Ayo-Maria Atoyebi at the closing Mass of the grand finale of the Second National Marian Congress in the country, held at the Papal Ground, Kubwa, Abuja, (Friday 30 –Saturday 31, 2008), in Abuja in 2012. He was not only eloquent but passionately exhibited his passionate love for the Mother of Christ who he described as Mediatrix and intercessor between mankind and the Blessed Trinity. He outlined the unique qualities that made Mary the Queen of all generations and the co-saviour of humanity; like no one has ever done. The thirst
and unending love of Bishop Ayo-Maria for the Blessed Mother, who he likes calling as Mama Maria, is manifested in the various adoration programmes he has initiated in honour of the Mother of Christ; and attested to many of the faithful, within and outside Ilorin Diocese.

For the former Bishop of Ijebu-Ode Diocese, there is no need to see a soothsayer before one is convinced that he is a passionate devotee of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ; almost to a fault. A visit to the Chancery, when he was the Local Ordinary of Ijebu-Ode Diocese, gives one a deep insight of how in total commitment, this our Father in the Lord is tied to the apron string of the Mother of the Saviour, Lord Jesus Christ. Often, the most cherished gift Baba Fasina gives to any visitor is a package of different Novena Prayer books, pamphlet or devotional prayer cards to the Blessed Virgin Mary, painstakingly explaining how to do the novena. Any other gift from Baba Fasina, including money is secondary in importance or relevance.

His Christ-like life of piety and unalloyed love for the other person was recently summarized by the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins while speaking at the end of the Holy Mass to mark the 50th anniversary of Ijebu-Ode Diocese; 80th birthday anniversary and retirement of Bishop Fasina. He stated that the Bishop emeritus has spent about 40 years of his priestly life in Ijebu-Ode Diocese and has been an inspiration for everyone because he overcame the “Ego.” He overcame the self especially with a sense of self-importance. The Archbishop continued “Baba is simple and humble.” Archbishop Martins encouraged everyone at the ceremony to learn from the simplicity and humility of Bishop Fasina; adding that “overcoming the Ego was the right way to go.”

These two retired pious local ordinaries and averred sons of Mother Mary, on daily basis, live the Blessed Virgin Mary, dream her and tell about her wonderful role in the salvific mission of her adorable son, Jesus Christ; at every opportunity and occasion. They, with reference declare her invaluable role in the mission, and evangelization apostolate of the Church and the redemption of humanity. While on active service, they preach her in season and out of season.

Now as emeriti Bishops these sons of the mother Mary have more time to take the Holy Mother to more people, who lead them to her son, Jesus Christ. It will not be out of place to conclude that the obsession of these two emeriti Bishops were able to hold their heads high in the difficult terrain of Moslem dominated environments with the help of Mary, the Mother of God and mediatrix of all humanity. We wish them more years of meritorious service and dedication to Mama Maria, the Mother of the Church, the woman who arrow pierced her heart so that humanity might have salvation.
A Reflection on the BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

By Most Rev. Ayo-Maria Atoyebi OP
(Bishop Emeritus, Ilorin Diocese)

It will take a revelation from heaven to make us know the invaluable worth of our Blessed Mother Mama Maria. We cannot appreciate enough her maternal influence in our lives. God makes it so all-encompassing that we cannot thank him enough for giving us such an admirable mother. She is the mother of mothers, the mother par excellence who always wants the best for her children. St. Louis Mary de Montfort said “Mary adorns her clients with her merits, assists them with her power, enlightens them with her light, and kindles them with her love. She imparts her virtues to them and becomes their security, their intercessor and their all with Jesus” (De Montfort 1673-1716).

Mama Maria cares for us more than our natural mothers do because she is more powerful than them in every way and her knowledge about what really matters is incomparably greater than theirs. This goes to encourage us to always dedicate ourselves to her who can prevent us from all evils. We should not hesitate to put our entire life into her hands. She who took care of Jesus, the God-man can easily take care of us imperfect as we are and enhance our greater perfection. We need to appreciate what the saints said about her. Their Pronouncements did not come out of Philosophical speculation but they came from practical live experience which should help us to deepen our devotion to the mother of God.

Augustine said this more succinctly, “Through Mary, the miserable obtain mercy, the graceless find grace, and sinners received pardon” (St Augustine of Hippo 354-430). The words of the saints are like the words of God himself because while they were here on earth they were constituted as the light of the world, Jesus said: “you are the light of the world. A city built on the hill cannot be hidden” (Mt 5:14). The saints radiated the light of Christ in the world by being witnesses to the lord Jesus. They are genuine and authentic witnesses of the whole truth of Christ consequently all they said about Mama Maria has the weight of divine illumination, inspiration authenticity and power. They are lights and witnesses of Christ and their words are words coming from the very heart of God. They are endowed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit who is the promise of Jesus when he said: “But when the holy spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Act 1:8) their words, as we just mentioned are like the very words coming from the heart of God. The witness of the scripture about the word of God is, “your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.” (Ps.119:105)

The words of the church and the Saints about Mama Maria are the lamps to guide us; they are lights for us on our pilgrimage on earth. The certainty we have about this difficult pilgrimage is that we are not trudging alone. The Immaculate mother is walking with us as she walked with her son even to his crucifixion. In all the distress and tribulations of our life we should always fly to her consoler of the human race, she never ceases to pour out before him her prayer for salvation of the faithful crushed by the weight of sin”.

Mama Maria cares for us more than our natural mothers do because she is more powerful than them in every way and her knowledge about what really matters is incomparably greater than theirs. This goes to encourage us to always dedicate ourselves to her who can prevent us from all evils. We should not hesitate to put our entire life into her hands. She who took care of Jesus, the God-man can easily take care of us imperfect as we are and enhance our greater perfection. We need to appreciate what the saints said about her. Their Pronouncements did not come out of Philosophical speculation but they came from practical live experience which should help us to deepen our devotion to the mother of God.

St Francis de Sales (1567-1622) said, “Those who wants to prevent their hearts from being pervaded by the evils of earth should entrust it to the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady and Our Mother. They will then rejoin it in heaven, freed from all evils”. In the same vein of certainty St. John Bosco (1815-1888) said: “we find ourselves on earth as in a tempestuous sea, a desert, and a vale of tears. But Mary is the star of the sea, the solace of our desert, and the light that guides us to heaven.” No one goes to Mama Maria and comes back with empty hands. Rather she fills you with her motherly tenderness and of Jesus her son who said: “I come so that they may have life in abundance.” (Jn 10:10) Saint John Eudes (1601-1680) reflected this when he said: “Let all hearts give themselves to Mary so that she will fill them with her heart and the heart of Jesus!” The Marian pope saint Pius V (pontificate 1566-72) said, “Mary ever Virgin, is a true mother of mercy who disposes Jesus to clemency. As

Augustine said this more succinctly, “Through Mary, the miserable obtain mercy, the graceless find grace, and sinners received pardon” (St Augustine of Hippo 354-430). The words of the saints are like the words of God himself because while they were here on earth they were constituted as the light of the world, Jesus said: “you are the light of the world. A city built on the hill cannot be hidden”. (Mt 5:14). The saints radiated the light of Christ in the world by being witnesses to the lord Jesus. They are genuine and authentic witnesses of the whole truth of Christ consequently all they said about Mama Maria has the weight of divine illumination, inspiration authenticity and power. They are lights and witnesses of Christ and their words are words coming from the very heart of God. They are endowed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit who is the promise of Jesus when he said: “But when the holy spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. (Act 1:8) their words, as we just mentioned are like the very words coming from the heart of God. The witness of the scripture about the word of God is, “your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.” (Ps.119:105)

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The first-person Mama Maria bore was our Lord Jesus Christ according to the divine arrangement. As we read in the gospel of St. Luke, God sent an angel to Mary to announce to her that she has been greatly blessed by God. Mary received this news with great surprise and she was deeply troubled. The angel calmed her down by saying: Don’t be afraid Mary, God has been gracious to you. 31. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus. “He will be great and be called the son of the highest God…” (Lk 1:26-33) Mary, according to divine dispensation is the natural mother of God. Man, the son of God. We are the brothers and sisters of her son because Jesus embraced us as our mother when he said to John while he was on the cross “Behold your mother, and said to Mama Maria “Behold your son”. (Jn 19: 26-27). John the beloved disciple represented all of the disciples of Jesus whom Jesus has constituted us as his beloved ones by willingly dying on the cross and “he became the source of eternal life for those who obey him” (Heb 5:9).

John the beloved disciple obeyed Jesus because after Jesus had instructed him to behold the Blessed Mother as his mother, immediately he responded positively to Jesus, the scripture says “from that time the disciples took her to live in his home”. (Jn 19:27). By the obedience of John, Jesus became the source of eternal life to him. We ourselves can only draw from Jesus, the source of eternal life when in obedience to him we take his mother to our heart, and we love her tenderly as our spiritual mother. There cannot be any good spirituality in the church which lacks authentic Maria spirituality, if it does it lacks what can make it perfect. We should count ourselves most fortunate for the favour the Lord Jesus gave us to give us his Mother as our Mother, that is a most treasured legacy. The most important legacy or will are usually given at the last moment of life. Jesus announced his last will to us at the most sacred hour of his life, he gave us his mother as the most treasured legacy. We cannot thank him enough. (thank you, Jesus, thank you my Lord, whatever I have now is out of your grace…).

Mama Maria bore only one son who is the only begotten son of God. Jesus redeemed us in his blood and embraced us as his brothers and sisters. In that divine arrangement we become the children of the immaculate Mother of God. She cannot but be the mother of those who are her son’s brothers and sisters. Blessed Abbot Guerric words put in the Saturday Memoria of the Blessed Virgin Mary deserve our appreciation.

Mary bore only one son. In heaven, he is the only begotten of the father, on earth, likewise, he is the only begotten of his Mother. She who is the only Virgin-Mother, she who glories in having borne the only begotten of the Father, embraces that only begotten of hers in all his members so she can truly be called mother of all in who she sees that Christ her son has been formed or is being formed.

The first Eve is not so much a mother as a stepmother since she handed on to her children an inheritance of certain death rather than the beginning of light. She is indeed called the mother of all living, but she turned out to be more precisely the murder of the living, or mother of the dead, since the only fruit of her children was death. And as Eve was incapable of fulfilling the vocation of her title, Mary consummated the mystery. She herself, like the church of which she is the type, is a mother of all who are reborn to life.

She is in fact the mother of the life by which everyone lives and when she brought it forth from herself, she in some way brought to rebirth all those who were to live by that life.

Thus, the Blessed Mother of Christ, knowing that she is the mother of all Christians by reason of this mystery, shows herself a mother by her care and loving attention. For her heart is not hardened against these children as if they were not her own; her womb carried a child once, yet it remains ever fruitful, never ceasing to be brought forth the fruits of her motherly compassion” (Blessed Abbot Guerric, Sermon 47: 2-4, from second Reading of Memoria of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday in the Breviary).

Mother Mary continues to help us increasingly from her throne in heaven. She did not abdicate her role as a caring mother who wants the best for her children. the joy of heaven could not prevent her from identifying with her children who are still in the valley of tears and distress. She is our mother “par excellence”. The fathers of Vatican II teach us that she participated in the suffering of her son in a very special way through her singular virtues of obedience, faith, hope and ardent charity. Consequently, she joined hands with her son in the work of restoring supernatural life to souls.

This Motherhood of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave with faith at the annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross; it will last without interruption until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Once assumed into heaven, she did not set aside this saving role, but with her numerous prayers of intercession continues to win for us the gifts of eternal salvation”. (Vatican II, church art 61-62).

Mama María is our most reliable advocate before God since Jesus himself is the one who constituted her as our advocate and she will not fail her son in this august and most demanding task. We can run to her with all confidence hoping that the darts of the world cannot harm us because her protective maternal mantle is most powerful to assure...
our safety and security. She stands as our unfailing advocate before God because of her unique relationship with the most Holy Trinity. Her unique advocacy was not preached in the apostolic era because she was with the apostles and secondly, the scenario of the time might confuse people as if Christianity wanted to promote the cult of another goddess as the surrounding pagans were doing.

However, the Early church did not fail to confirm and utilize Mama Maria’s role as our advocate in God’s plan of human salvation. During the second century, St Irenaeus referred to Mary as the advocate of Eve. “And whereas Eve had disobeyed God”, he said, “Mary was persuaded to obey God, that the Virgin Mary might become advocate of the Virgin Eve” (Adversus Haereses). In his own comment St Ephrew called Mary the friendly advocate of sinners. The description of the advocacy of St Germanus of Constantinople is powerful. He saw Mama Maria as the greatest intercessory and defender of sinners after Christ. He declared: “And who after your Jesus, is as tenderly solicitous for our welfare as you (Mary) are? Who defends us in the temptations with which we are afflicted as you defend us? Who, like you, undertakes to protect sinners, fighting, as it were, on their behalf?” (Homin S. Mariae Zonam PG 98,3306).

St. Benard of Clairvaus was a great devotee of Mama Maria. He recommended that we should not be searching for an advocate we should just go to Mama Maria. He said: “you wish to have an advocate with him (that is to say with Jesus) … have recourse to Mary.” And also “Our Lady, our mediatrix, our advocate, reconcile us to your son, represent us to your son”. The liturgy is a great source of instruction for us. The popular saying Lex Credendi Lex orandi, as we believe so we pray is always true. The church expresses her belief in the powerful advocacy of Mama Maria in her prayers that concludes the Rosary. “Hail Holy Queen”.

CBCN PLATFORM
To the mortal world, the death of late Bishop Kevin Aje, Emeritus of the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, was a great blow and loss. But his burial ceremony was a celebration of life as many came from far and near in testimony of an exemplary Christ-like life, dedication and commitment to the missionary work of Christ by an invaluable former chief Shepherd of Sokoto Diocese in the Lord’s vineyard.

The first indigenous Catholic Bishop in the area considered the haven of Islam in Nigeria, worked laboriously to continue the work started by the missionaries and won many souls for Christ, amidst challenges from different fronts. The invaluable achievements and virtues of the late Bishop Aje was summed up by the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, who described the late bishop emeritus as a role model and pioneer in many ways. He noted that the late Bishop Aje was “among the early group of zealous lay apostles who worked with the foreign missionaries, most of the time carrying much of the burden of the day, reaching out directly to the most remote places to bring into the Christian fold people at the grass root levels.”

Cardinal Onaiyekan made the above tribute while preaching the homily at the funeral Mass for the late bishop held at the Holy Family Catholic Cathedral, Sokoto, Sokoto State. The cardinal continued: “… he was a true man of God, with deep conviction and generous heart. Once he puts his hands on the plough, he never looked back. As a pioneer Nigerian priest in his days, he became an effective role model to many young men who were later to follow his footsteps.”

He outlined the achievements of the deceased as the pioneer indigenous bishop of the diocese of Sokoto stressing: “Carried on the wings of the Holy Spirit and empowered by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, he tended the flock of God in Sokoto for almost 30 years, handing over to his successor a stabilized and forward looking diocese. He described the late Bishop Aje as “a living expression of the Catholic doctrine on religious diversity under one God”. The above summary of the good Catholic life of the former Chief Shepherd of Sokoto Diocese was affirmed by the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), and the Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, who in his remarks described the deceased as an exemplary apostle of Christ who lived a life of simplicity and firmly believed in the Resurrection of Christ as victory over death; a faith he preached all his life. Noting that the CBCN, the Church in Nigeria, the diocese and entire people of Sokoto will miss the exemplary simplicity and fatherly care of the former chief Shepherd; Archbishop Akubeze stated that for more than 52 years as a priest and 36 years as a bishop, Bishop Aje taught many to accept the Christian way of life. Commiserating with the chief mourner, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah and the faithful of Sokoto Diocese; Archbishop Akubeze eulogized the deceased and described him as a great gift from God.

Preaching at the Vigil Mass held before the burial ceremony, Monsignor Cletus Gotan of the Archdiocese of Jos has warned that the lust for mundane things of life portend danger for everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven. The University Professor noted: “This life is very short and full of material things that can get in the way of our submission to the Almighty’. He however noted that it is not wrong to have these material possessions “as long as we remember our obligations to the Almighty and thank Him for his favours”. He therefore called for a recollection of our spiritual life on earth, in preparation for return to the life after, when God calls. According to him, every death is a warning to those of us still alive to be prepared, wake up, alert and “above all be converted because our turn could be next; since life is not ours to control or be wasted and abused”. He described life as a loving gift from God and meant to be lived in harmony with the purposes designed by God; warning that it should not be taken for granted.

Msgr Gotan spoke on the good virtues and qualities of the deceased noting that: “As a priest of the Archdiocese of Jos, Bishop offered a life of service to the people in various capacities that have changed the lives of so many people as Education Secretaries; Coordinator of JDPC, and Cathedral Administrator; as well as his invaluable service in the civil society. He added that the late Bishop Aje contributed a
lot to the growth of the Catholic Church in the whole of the former Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province and impacted positively on the lives of many and the society at large, spiritually and pastorally.

The concelebrated funeral Mass was presided over by the Metropolitan of Kaduna Archdiocese; Most Rev. Matthew Ndagoso assisted by His Eminence John Cardinal Onaiyekan, 16 other Bishops and many priests from different parts of the country. The final commendation ceremony was led by Most Rev. Felix Alaba Adeosin Job, the Emeritus Archbishop of Ibadan Archdiocese.

Present at the ceremony were: a high powered delegation of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), led by its President, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze of the Archdiocese of Benin City; former military head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, the immediate past Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbeh, who represented President Muhammadu Buhari, the traditional ruler of Ikulu Kingdom in Kaduna state, Chief Kukah, many priests and religious of different congregations and lay faithful from different parts of the country.


Cross section of some of the Bishops at the celebration of the funeral Mass.

Cross section of Rev. Frs. At the funeral Mass.

Cross section of Rev. Sisters at the funeral Mass.

Cross section of the female faithful at the funeral Mass.

The casket containing the remains of late Bishop Kevin Aje.
When the Holy Father convoked the extraordinary Synod of Bishops on Youth and Vocation Discernment for Rome, in 2018; the primary goal was to reawaken the Universal Church on the invaluable role of the youth, not only as the future of the Church, but also her present; since there can be no future without roots; and the need to reposition the youths of the Church and get them more involved in her missionary apostolate and encouraging or helping them to give their lives to God by being embracing life of holiness as servants in the Lord’s vineyard, through personal discernment. The synod also discussed abuse crisis and same-sex attraction and other relevant issues bothering on the importance of dialogue and sodality in the Church.

The extraordinary synod which took place at the Vatican from October 3rd to 28th, 2018; extensively discussed: Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment and was attended by about 260 Bishops from about 130 countries of the world, lay professionals and experts as well as 36 young people from the different continents of the world.

In his opening remarks, Pope Francis expressed gratitude to the youths present at the synod and world youths in general for responding to the call of the Church to be part of her. His words: “I would also like to sincerely thank the young people connected to us now, and all the youth who in so many ways have made their voices heard. I thank them for having wagered that it is worth the effort to feel part of the Church or to enter into dialogue with her; worth the effort to have the Church as a mother, as a teacher, as a home, as a family, and, despite human weaknesses and difficulties, capable of radiating and conveying Christ’s timeless message; worth the effort to hold onto the boat of the Church which, despite the world’s cruel storms, continues to offer shelter and hospitality to everyone; worth the effort to listen to one another; worth the effort to swim against the tide and be bound by lofty values: family, fidelity, love, faith, sacrifice, service, eternal life. Our responsibility here at the Synod is not to undermine them; but rather to show that they are right to wager: it truly is worth the effort, it is not a waste of time!

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He stated further: The Synod we are living is a moment of sharing. I wish, therefore, at the beginning of the Synod Assembly, to invite everyone to speak with courage and frankness (parrhesia), namely to integrate freedom, truth and charity. Only dialogue can help us grow. An honest, transparent critique is constructive and helpful, and does not engage in useless chatter, rumours, conjectures or prejudices." The Pope added that: “humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking.

The outcome of the Synod clearly reflected the wishes of the Holy Father as the Synod Fathers along with other delegates at the synod took far reaching decisions on how the Church could be a listening Church to the young people and how the young people could complement the desire of the Universal Church in this perspective. The introduction of the final report of the synod succinctly gives the summary of the outcome of the synod under the title: The synodal event that we experienced. It runs thus: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 3:1). This is what we experienced during the Synod, as we walked together and listened to the voice of the Spirit. He amazed us with the wealth of his gifts and filled us with his courage and strength, to bring hope to the world.

We journeyed together, with the Successor of Peter, who strengthened us in faith and gave us fresh vigour and enthusiasm for the mission. Even though we came from widely differing cultural and ecclesial backgrounds, we were aware from the outset of a spiritual bond uniting us, a desire for dialogue, a real empathy. We worked together, sharing our deepest concerns, communicating our worries, not concealing our troubles. Many of the interventions touched us deeply and awakened us in evangelical compassion: we felt as one body, suffering and rejoicing together. We want to share with everyone the grace that we experienced and we want to pass on the joy of the Gospel to our Churches and to the whole world.

The presence of young people was something new: through them the voice of a whole generation was heard in the Synod. Journeying with them as pilgrims to the tomb of Peter, we experienced how drawing together in this way creates the conditions for the Church to become a place of dialogue and a witness to a life-giving fraternity. The power of this experience overcomes all weariness and weakness. The Lord says to us again and again: Do not be afraid, I am with you.”

We benefitted greatly from the contributions of the bishops’ conferences and from the insights of pastors, religious, laypersons, experts, teachers and many others. From the outset young people were involved in the synodal process: the online questionnaire, the large number of personal testimonies and above all the pre-synodal Meeting were an eloquent indication of this. Their contribution was essential, just as in the account of the loaves and the fish: Jesus was able to perform the miracle thanks to the availability of a young man who generously offered what he had (cf. Jn 6:8-11).

The 167 paragraphs document is divided into three parts with a total of eight chapters, a foreword and conclusion. Areas of concern highlighted in the document included: the invaluable role of synodality and dialogue in the life of the Church as the
body of Christ comprising of both old and young, men and women; the Church as a listening Church with empathy; the diversity and contexts of cultures; a first look at the Church of today; the three crucial elements of: The newness of the digital environment, Migrants as a paradigm of our time and Recognizing and reacting to all types of abuse. It also addressed the issues of Spirituality and religiosity; Young people in the Church; A new Pentecost; the action of the Holy Spirit and how The Spirit rejuvenates the Church; The Gift of Youth with reference to the life of Jesus as a young man among the young: Characteristics of youth; The youth; the Wounded young people; The Mystery of Vocation; and the search for vocation noting vocation as a journey and discovery.

After considering the document of the Synod Fathers, Pope Francis issued the Apostolic Exhortation. Christus Vivit, (Christ Lives). The document dubbed as the Letter from the Holy Father to all Christian young people all over the world and released by the Vatican on April 2, 2019; summarizes in about 35,000 words, the outcome of the deliberations of the synod delegates, emphasizing the “three great truths that all of us need constantly to keep hearing”—that God loves us, that Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our salvation, and that Jesus is alive today. The Pope called on the youths to be courageous missionaries of the Good News of Christ, urging them to find wisdom in the Church, and learn from the elderly. At the same time, he warned the Church not to cling to the past; finding it necessary to be present in the context of the present day world.

The Pope's position is summed up in the opening introduction to the Exhortation in which the Holy Father says:

1. Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!

2. He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One. He calls you and he waits for you to return to him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope.

3. With great affection, I address this Apostolic Exhortation to all Christian young people. It is meant to remind you of certain convictions born of our faith, and at the same time to encourage you to grow in holiness and in commitment to your personal vocation. But since it is also part of a synodal process, I am also addressing this message to the entire People of God, pastors and faithful alike, since all of us are challenged and urged to reflect both on the young and for the young. Consequently, I will speak to young people directly in some places, while in others I will propose some more general considerations for the Church's discernment.

4. I have let myself be inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations that emerged from last year’s Synod. I cannot include all those contributions here, but you can read them in the Final Document. In writing this letter, though, I have attempted to summarize those proposals I considered most significant. In this way, my words will echo the myriad voices of believers the world over who made their opinions known to the Synod. Those young people who are not believers, yet wished to share their thoughts, also raised issues that led me to ask new questions.

The Apostolic Exhortation has nine Chapters of 299 paragraphs which with inspiration and discernment addressed all the issues raised by the synod delegates in their document. Chapter one speaks on What Word of God has to say about young people, while chapter two was on Christ as a youth in all ages. He sums this up thus: Jesus is ‘young among the young in order to be an example for the young and to consecrate them to the Lord’. For this reason the Synod said that “youth is an original and stimulating stage of life, which Jesus himself experienced, thereby sanctifying it”.

The document outlines some basic points that are peculiar to the youths of the world; and need the attention of the Church to enable her relate with them and make them more involved in the activities and evangelization mission of the Church, taking into consideration the realities of the present day world, the digital world of which these youths are the citizens, and find a way of blending their ways with the Church of old which is analog in nature but cannot remain static and indifferent, if she is to make Christ present in today's world. These peculiarities of the youths which the Holy Father identified as crucial to the
concern of the Universal Church include: the challenges facing the young people of the world to which they find the solution in three great truths; the richness of young people in role models; the key to making the years of the youth count in friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ and how these young people respond to Christ’s plan for them through personalized vocation discernment.

Pope Francis concludes the Exhortation with a wish in which he declared: “Dear young people, my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or fearful. Keep running, “attracted by the face of Christ, whom we love so much, whom we adore in the Holy Eucharist and acknowledge in the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us.”

The Apostolic Exhortation the seventh in the pontificate of Pope Francis, since he became the head of the Universal Catholic Church, is a challenge and guideline to the Episcopal Conferences of the churches all over the world; calling for discernment on the part of the Bishops on the total integration of youths into the spiritual and pastoral activities of the Church; not as the tomorrow of the Church but as present in the context of preparation for the future.

In order to assist Churches all over the world to embark on practical activities and programmes that would transform the Holy Father’s Exhortation into reality and in consonance of the diverse cultures and traditions of each country, without distorting the spiritual and pastoral teachings of the Church, the Vatican published a working document version of the Exhortation to guide each Conference and church in all parts of the world in the realization of the decisions of the synod fathers.

Responding to the clarion call of the Holy Father, the Church in Nigeria has put in place several activities and programmes for the reactivation of her youths as invaluable agents of dissemination of the Good News of Christ, especially among their peers. In this perspective, the CBCN Youth Committee Office in the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), kick started the Nigerian church programme with a four-day training seminar for delegates of all the youth groups from all the Archdioceses and diocese in the country. The theme of the seminar was: Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment. The programme was powered by Daily Strength Devotional.

Nigeria was represented at the Synod by Most Rev. John Oyejola, Bishop of Osogbo Diocese and CBCN Youth Committee Chairman; Most Rev. Godfrey Onah of Nsukka Diocese and Most Rev. Michael Apochi of Otukpo Diocese.
From August 30 to September 11, members of the International Young Catholic Students gathered at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre (DRACC), for the 16th World Council and International YCS Global Training Session with: Taking Action for Peace Here and Now as its theme. In attendance were delegates from over 16 countries of the world and activities included spiritual, pastoral and academic sessions.

The programme began with an opening Mass with Most Rev. John Oyejola, CBCN Youth Committee Chairman presiding; assisted by Msgr. Hypolite Adigwe who preached the homily; and Rev. Fr. Charles Menezes, the International Chaplain of the association. In his homily, Msgr. Adigwe described the YCS as one of the recognized associations of the Catholic Church with adequate responsibility for spiritual and pastoral activities. He went down memory lane of the activities and roles of the association which include “a spirituality of seeing the whole of life concretely, critically and deeply. Other areas the homilist spoke on included: spirituality of judging reality and the spirituality of transformation or spirituality of action.”

Speaking on the theme of the meeting, Msgr. Adigwe declared:

FLOWER GIFTS TO WELCOME DELEGATES TO NIGERIA

Bishop John Oyejola of Osogbo Diocese and CBCN Episcopal chairman for Youth Committee, welcoming representatives of some the countries attending the International YCS Global Training Session & 16th World Council on: TAKING ACTION FOR PEACE; HERE AND NOW; to Abuja, Nigeria; with flowers.
“This indeed is what we need very urgently here in Nigeria and in the whole world. We eagerly await your decisions and proposals of concrete actions that will contribute to the work which the Church and many nations of the world are undertaking in order to achieve peace, as we together pray to the Lord to grant us that peace which the world cannot give.

In his welcome address, Bishop John Oyejola of Osogbo Diocese and CBCN Youth Committee Chairman, described the conference as “a marvelous reminder to all participants of Catholic action and apostolate, faith deepening, evangelization, sanctification and formation of Christian conscience by the Young Catholic Students Worldwide.”

While noting that the young students have countless opportunities, Bishop Oyejola reminded them that: “The rights given to you by the Church to participate in the apostolate equally impose on you corresponding obligation to work hard for the good of the Church in your schools, colleges and campuses. You are co-responsible with the bishops, clergy and religious in the Church for the mission of Christ.”

In his own address, the Secretary General of the association at the global level, Mr. Richard Francis Apeh told the delegates that during the Study Session part of the meeting, we will seek to interrogate and to proffer solution to the crises of significant number of young people who are not yet actively engaged in peace-building process and who at times are weighed down by their crises of identity due to increasing external psychosocial pressures.

Other speakers at the opening ceremony included the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi and the International Chaplain of YCS, Rev. Fr. Charles Menezes who noted that the IYCS is on the threshold of a new beginning because of its challenges in organizing and sustaining the movement.
INTERNATIONAL YCS TRAINING/WORLD COUNCIL MEETING IN PICTURES

CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi (third from left); leading the opening prayer at the opening ceremony.

Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu, CSN Director of Pastoral Agents Department (second from right) and Rev. Fr. Mark Obayi CSN Youth Animator and Secretary CBCN Youth Committee (third from right); eith other guests at the opening ceremony.

Some of the delegates at the opening ceremony.

Another group of delegates at the opening ceremony.

Nigerian YCS choir group welcoming delegates to Nigeria with special songs at the opening ceremony.

Guests at the high table cutting the celebration cake.

Atilogwu dancers entertaining the delegates and guests at the opening ceremony.
Harnessing the gifts of youths can be very beneficial to the evangelization of the mission of the Church and the common good of humanity, if properly utilised, the Catholic Bishop of Osogbo Diocese, Most Rev. John Oyejola has asserted.

Bishop Oyejola who is the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Youth Committee Chairman made this remark when delivering the keynote address at the four-day workshop seminar organized by the Youth Office of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN). The programme was part the Nigeria Church response to the outcome of the report of the 2018 Synod of Bishops on Youth, held in Rome; and the subsequent Apostolic Exhortation on the synod – Christus Vivit, by the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

The programme which took place at the Archbishop Obiefuna Retreat Centre, Awka, Anambra State, with Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment as its theme; was attended by delegates of all the youth group of the Church in Nigeria, and presentations made of various related topics to the team by experts in different fields of human endeavour. Speakers at the programme included the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah whose paper was premised on Thoughts on Catholic Youths participation in Nigerian Politics.

Noting that the unique resources of the youth can help define their roles in creating a good future for the Church, the Bishop Chairman expressed the desire for the maximisation of this special gifts of the youth for the benefit of the Church and the common good. Bishop Oyejola contended that: “If well managed, the talents, enthusiasms and vigour of the youths can be veritable tools in the hands of the Church to achieve magnificent things for God.”

He however pointed out that: “The problem most times is that the potential of young people in the Church are overlooked and dismissed on the grounds that they are impetuous, ignorant and unworthy of serious responsibility”; adding that if the youths are well guided, “God can use their impetuousness and ‘ignorance’ to achieve great things.”

The bishop stated further that what the Church presently needs is to learn new and better ways of journeying with young people, listening and reaching out to them, without being judgemental and empowering them to make positive contributions to the mission of the Church as well as in their lives. He added that they must be encouraged to embrace a life of holiness and hard work and make them effective agents in the spiritual and pastoral life of the Church, particularly as agents of evangelization among their peers.

While advocating the need for everybody involved in the Church to acknowledge the special gifts the youths possess and put to them to use, Bishop Oyejola who outlined the ten most challenges facing the present-day youths, urged them
be closer to God in prayer and take their faith seriously; be disciplined and be morally upright. His words: “A person without a sense of values will be worthless in the society. At this point in our national history, things are extremely difficult, you must not be tempted to give up until you overcome all the challenges in your path to greatness.”

The bishop added: “As noted by a wise man: “You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself.” To succeed in any noble venture you have to take 100% personal responsibility for everything you experience in life.”

Bishop Oyejola described the challenges facing youths in Nigeria as a global phenomenon and not peculiar to the country.

The CBCN Youth Committee Chairman declared: “The challenges confronting young people everywhere in the world are similar. Earlier this year, Education and Health Charity, Central YMCA, surveyed 1,600 young people aged between 16 and 25. The reason for the survey was to assess the nature of the challenges young people are facing in our time.

He continued: “The top 10 of the challenges identified by the 1,600 surveyed young people are: Lack of employment opportunities; Failure to succeed in education system; Issues related to body image; Family problems; Substance abuse; Pressures of materialism; Lack of affordable housing; Negative stereotyping; Pressures of 24-hour social networking and Crime.”

Bishop Oyejola added: “For those who are familiar with what young people are going through in our country, they will think that the survey was done in Nigeria. A look through the list shows that it represents the challenges of young Nigerians, as well as the challenges confronting young people all over the world. Having said this however, I want to add that these challenges come in various ways and degrees in different parts of the world.

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The Bishop Chairman stated further: “For this reason, I think whatever is done at the global level should be brought down to the local level for implementation. Now that the programme has been brought to our country, it is very important that you must be interested and actively involved in it. “You cannot win in the game of life if you are not on the playing field.”

According to the Osogbo Diocese local ordinary, the seminar is aimed at bringing to Nigerian youths the message of the Synod and the challenges identified; with a view of finding solutions to them in the context of the Nigerian nation. His words: “The speakers at this seminar will not just be looking at the serious issues raised in the Synod on young people from a global perspective; they will speak to the Nigerian situation.”

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The Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah has described politics as a communal association for collaboration and service for initiation of programmes and activities that would facilitate development for the common good of the people.

The Bishop made this declaration in his paper titled: Some Thoughts on Catholic Participation in Nigerian Politics, presented at the National Youth Seminar, organized by the Youth Office of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), recently, at the Archbishop Obiefuna Retreat Centre, Awka, Anambra State.

Noting that politics could be likened to going to church, which is a communion of community solidarity, Bishop Kukah however warned that, participation of Catholics, including youths, in active politics must be guided by the principles, norms and teachings of the Catholic Church. Using some passages in the Bible to highlight how and why Catholics should be involved in politics, the Local Ordinary of Sokoto Diocese, explained the passage “giving unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar” (Mt. 22: 21); which many have erroneously assumed as a tacit directive from Christ for Catholics not to be involved in politics.

He said: “We have often fallen back on the encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees who demanded to know whether they are to pay taxes to Caesar or not as a reference for the involvement of Christians in politics. According to the story, the Pharisees confronted Jesus with questions of loyalty and allegiance to civil authority by the Pharisees. Was it right, they said, to pay tax to Caesar or not? In response, Jesus said to His listeners: Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God (Mt.22: 21).”

The Bishop continued: “The meaning of this text has preoccupied many scholars of Christian involvement in politics. However, years and years of misapplication have led many Christians or even non-Christians to assert that Jesus was telling Christians to stay off politics that belonged to Caesar and focus on spiritual matters that are of God. Yet on closer examination, nothing could be further from the truth.”

Giving a true perspective of the Biblical passage and combining it with story of the Good Samaritan Lk.10:25-37), the bishop noted the latter as “a story of a good Christian making the right decision on the highway”. He emphasized that: “for the Christian, politics should be seen as an offering to God who owns Caesar, his kingdom which, we ourselves are part of.” He added: “It is only natural that we participate otherwise, others will borrow our voices and come to decisions on our behalf.”

Bishop Kukah however outlined guidelines that are necessary for effective and successful participation of Catholic youths in politics noting among other things that politics is a vocation and a service in which participants must listen to the voice of God and the Church and embrace patience among other conditions.

He noted that the Knowledge of the teachings of the Catholic Church are essential for successful participation in politics, the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev.
Matthew Hassan Kukah has declared. Bishop Kukah who described politics as a vocation, justified the participation of Catholics, including youths in politics and gave the guidelines for successful participation of youths in Nigerian politics. According to him, paramount among the necessary guiding factors are: listening to the voice of the God and his Church, trusting God’s will and accepting his grace; familiarity with the doctrine and teachings of the Church and of course complying religiously with the See, Judge and Act motto of the youth body in the country.

Other essential factor outlined by Bishop Kukah, who according to him are not exhaustive are: need for careful examination of oneself in the inner heart before venturing into politics; keeping a close family; learning to serve or volunteer; knowing their immediate community, speaking their language and eating their food; reading, studying and learning and most importantly having a profession or being gainfully engaged, in case the venture into politics fail.

On the need to listen to the voice of God and his Church, Bishop Kukah declared: “In the affairs of politics, it is best to listen and understand the purity of the voice that is calling you or purported to be calling you. Perhaps the voice you claim to be hearing is the voice of the devil feeding on your personal greed for power. So, here, should you feel a call to politics, pray over and over for God to help you know if this is really what He wants you to do. Often, He will lead you to an Eli, with a small e. Your Eli could be a priest, a friend, your parents, or a key politician or public office holder whom you respect. These should be your first steps.”

Equally stressing the need for youths to have a profession before going into politics, the Local Ordinary of Sokoto Diocese while advocating patience and service as vital tools for active participation averred: “Please, remember that politics is not a form of employment. It is a gamble, sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose. What do you fall back on? You will fall back on what you were doing before politics. Do not be like those who have no Party, no ideology, believe in nothing, except the easy way to money. The corridors of power are their offices and places of worship. If you bring your career and areas of specialisation to politics, governing will be a workshop for you to design and implement the dreams you already have.”

Other speakers at the programme were: Most Rev. Dr. Earnest Obodo, Auxiliary Bishop of Enugu Diocese, whose presentation was premised on: The Youth, The Faith and The Call for Evangelization; Rt. Rev. Msgr. John Aniagwu, Vicar-General, Archdiocese of Lagos who spoke on: Safe Environment in the Wake of Clerical Abuse: The Role of the Catholic youth; and Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu, CSN Director of Pastoral Agents who gave a welcome address on behalf of the secretariat.

Also, Rev. Fr. Samuel Akagwu, Dean of Philosophy, St Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Makurdi, Benue State, spoke on Called to Holiness; while Professor Charles Esimone, the Vice Chancellor of Nnamidi Azikiwe University, Akwa; Sir Sunday Nwosu, Investment Expert; Dr. Emmanuel Okechukwu, CBCN Health Committee Secretary; and Mr. Muyiwa Matuluko, Co-founder & Editor-in-Chief Techpoint Africa; spoke respectively on Youth and the Future of Nigeria, Surviving Harsh Economic Reality in Nigeria, Defending the Culture of Life and Exploring Opportunities in Digital Media.
The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of all the Christian Churches in the country held its national Delegates Congress election, to ratify the election of the President and Vice President, who will direct the affairs of the association for the next three years. The ceremony was presided over by Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomwanghe SMA; the CSN Director of Mission and Dialogue Department and head of the Catholic delegation in the umbrella body. The primary assignment of the delegates’ conference, which was attended by about 270 delegates from the five-bloc Church members and officers at the national, regional and state levels, was to ratify the election of the Electoral College that took place earlier. This was preceded by an election between three aspirants for the position of the President of the association, conducted by an electoral body headed by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese.

The uniqueness of this year’s election process was the participation of the Catholic Church delegates under the umbrella of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); after five years of non-participation in the programmes of the association at the national level. According to the association’s Constitution, election for the president of the association are conducted in three stages; first by an elected Electoral Body comprising of representatives of member-bloc Churches. This 15-man body for this election had Bishop Matthew Hassah Kukah of Sokoto Diocese as its Chairman. Three contestants: Dr. Samson Ayokunle of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) Bloc, Rev. Dr. Caleb Ahima of the TEKAN and ECWA Fellowship Bloc and the incumbent, Dr. Ayokunle emerged winner while Dr. Ahima came second. This was followed by the second round of election between Dr. Ayokunle and Dr. Ahima with about 103 elected National Delegates, and national officers, regional and state’s chairmen forming the Electoral College. This election process was also presided over by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah; and Dr. Ayokunle emerged winner with Dr. Ahima, automatically becoming the Vice President. The third and final stage – National Delegates Congress, which comprised of a larger number of blocs-member representatives (about 250 delegates) met to ratify or otherwise, the result of the second stage election. All the elections and the National Delegates Congress were held at the National Christian Centre, Abuja.

Group photograph of the leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). (Eight from left is the President, Dr. Samson Ayokunle. He is flanked by Mr. Boss Mustapha (right) and Senator Dino Melaye (left)
In his address to the 103 delegates of the five Church bloc members of the association at the end of the second round of election, the Chairman of the Electoral College, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah called on leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), to focus on the unity of the Body of Christ, concentrate on things that will bring all Christian denominations in the country together; and avoid being tied to the apron-string of any government in power.

Bishop Kukah while congratulating the two contestants for their spirit of sportsmanship and the successful outcome of the election noted that either of them was qualified to lead the umbrella body of Christians in the country. He also commended the delegates for the orderly way they comported themselves during the voting process and ensuring that there was no rancour.

The Local Ordinary of Sokoto Diocese urged the President and his new Vice to focus on the task of bringing and holding together the body of Christ, stressing that the new executive must collaborate and cooperate to make CAN sufficiently distant from government and the politics of the country, which he described as being “toxic”.

In his post-election speech, Dr. Samson Ayokunle thanked the delegates for their comportment and making the election rancour free to the disappointment of critics who were waiting for a rowdy and inconclusive exercise. Noting that Christianity is facing a great challenge in the country, the CAN President declared: “Let us speak with one voice as the body of Christ, pacify dissenting voices and make them see reason; and stop using the social media and the regular media to show our grievances and thereby demean the body of Christ”.

The President further urged that everything should be done within the CAN fold to prevent security forces from meddling in the affairs of the association, neither should members resolve to litigations to settle Church matters.

Also speaking at the end of the election, the newly elected Vice President, Dr. Caleb Ahima assured of his commitment to the unity of the association to counter the challenges facing Christianity in the country. He expressed satisfaction at the peaceful way the election went and promised to cooperate and collaborate with the president to ensure that the objectives of the association as the umbrella body of all Christian denominations in the country are realized.

Delegates pay courtesy visit to Fr. Samjumi

The delegates of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN-Bloc) at the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of all Christian Churches in the country; paid a courtesy call on the Secretary General of CSN, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi in his office in Durumi, Abuja, recently as part of the preparation for their participation in the association’s national election slated for 18th June 2019. The delegation was led by the leader of the CSN Bloc at CAN, Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomhwange SMA, CSN Director of Mission and Dialogue department.

The participation of the delegates in the election was a reaffirmation of the return of the Catholic Church to the CAN fold, after five years of boycott of the activities of the association at the national level, by the Catholic Church. Welcoming the delegates to his office Fr. Zacharia Samjumi briefed them on what prompted the decision of the Catholic Bishops not to participate in the activities of the association at the national level and urged them to remain focused and align with the position of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), on the purpose and ultimate goal of the association for the common good of Christianity and the country in general.

According to the CSN Secretary General, what led to the five-year suspension of the participation of the Catholic Church in the activities of the association at the national level was in the interest of the Christian faith and the common good of the society. He disclosed that the attempt by the former leadership of the association to make CAN an appendage of government and other actions that negate the objectives of the founding fathers of the association prompted the action of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference (CBCN).
He added that making the association an appendage of government portends danger not only for the body but also for the followers of Christ in the country; as this makes the body a political ally of the political party in power, which is against the spiritual and pastoral objectives of the association and not in conformity with the directives of Christ.

Fr. Samjumi, noted that there is the need for an overhaul of the Constitution of the association to insulate it from being turned into an organ of the government in power with the temptation of supporting the oppression of the people as might be deemed fit by the government in power. In this respect, the Body of Christ (as represented by CAN) will no longer be able to perform its responsibility as the voice of the voiceless; protect the interests of Christians in the country as well as that of the poor, the needy and the oppressed and ensure justice and equity in the society.

The officers and delegates who were with Fr. Nomhwange, on the courtesy visit were: Rev. Fr. Gregory Obanado, CSN Secretary of Dialogue in the department of Mission and Dialogue; Rev. Fr. Moses Iyara, CSN Secretary for Inculturation and Translation; Rev. Fr. Cornelius Omonokhua; a former director at CSN and now Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Commission (NIREC); Sir Peter Igbinijesu; Miss Bridget Itodo; Barrister Comfort Otera Chigbue;; Mrs. Vera Nwosu; Mrs. Clara Peter; Mr. Sunday Imuh and Otunba Jide Fadugba-Pinheiro of the Directorate of Social Communications; Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN).

**RADIO ZAMBIAN DELEGATION VISITS CSN**

High Commissioner Emphasizes Importance Of Church In Nation Building

The Zambian High Commissioner to Nigeria, Mr Solomon Samuel Jere has reiterated the importance of the role of the Church in the development of any nation, the human person and the society in general. The Ambassador made this assertion in his speech when he led a delegation of Radio Icengelo from Ndola, Zambia, on a courtesy visit to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN).

The visitors were received by the Director of Social Communications and Deputy Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Chris Anayanwu, who welcomed them on behalf of the CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi and discussed various issues concerning the activities of the Secretariat and other relevant issues on the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the country.

Noting that the Church is the link between God and the State and the people, Mr Solomon Samuel Jere stated that the role of the Church in bringing God’s blessings, peace, justice and equity to any nation cannot be controverted. He therefore stressed the need for all the faithful of the Catholic Church to cooperate and collaborate by using their various callings and vocations for the growth of the Church to enable her discharge her responsibilities towards the development of people and the nation for the common good of all.

The ambassador expressed satisfaction at the rate the Church in Nigeria is growing especially in the area of the use of modern technology to facilitate her evangelization apostolate and services to humanity and not allowing the use of these modern technology to be an exclusive of the government.

In his own address, the leader of the visiting Radio station team, Rev. Fr. Benedict Ngandue outlined the mission of the team to Nigeria and stressed the need for collaboration and cooperation between all the agencies of the Church in the different countries of the continent to enhance the evangelization apostolate of the Church in Africa.

He briefed the CSN Director of Communications and Deputy Secretary General, on how the Radio Station has been promoting the apostolate of the Church in Zambia and their desire to learn and cooperate with the Church in Nigeria. He commended the communication apostolate of the Church in Nigeria noting that what they have seen in places visited shows that the communication apostolate of the Church in Nigeria is operating at an invaluabe level for the benefit of the Church and her evangelization mission.

In his welcome address, Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu welcomed the visitors on behalf of the Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi and the entire staff of the Secretariat and expressed the hope that the visiting team will help the purpose of their mission to the country realized. Fr. Anyanwu briefed them on the activities of the CSN Social Communications Directorate, pointing out that it propagates all the activities of the Bishops’ Conference, the Church in Nigeria as well as the activities of the various sodalities and different societies of the lay faithful in the country.

Fr. Anyanwu who briefed the visitors on the organogram structure and working operations of the Secretariat further informed them that the directorate also coordinates all the activities of the various professional groups that promote the communication apostolate of the Church in the country, under the aegis of Signis Nigeria, the umbrella body. The CSN Director of Social Communications further informed the visitors that the office also coordinates the relationship between the Church and the secular media as well as defend the cause and faith of the Church when the occasion arises.

While wishing the visitors an impressive success on their mission, he enjoined them to find time to enjoy the hospitality of the Nigerian people wherever they go. The CSN Deputy Secretary General assured them of the willingness of the CSN Directorate of Social Communications to cooperate and collaborate with Radio Icengelo in any area they might deem fit to enhance the relationship between the churches of the two countries.

Other members of the delegation, representing the various operational units of the Radio station are: Mr Moses Daka, Marvis Lundwe and Justina Matandiko. Other places visited by the visitors included: the Catholic Television, Good Shepherd newspaper, the Abuja Archdiocese directorate of Communications, all in Abuja; and the Archdiocese of Jos.
2019 MOTHER’S DAY CELEBRATION AT CSN

L-R: Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu, Rev. Fr. Augustine Okochi (chief celebrant) and Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu during the celebration of the Mass.

Cross section of the mothers at the celebration of the Mass.

The all-CSN women choir singing at the celebration of the Mass.

Cross section of CSN staff at the celebration.

The women dancing to the Altar for their thanksgiving.

Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu blessing the women after presenting their thanksgiving gifts.

Female staff of CSN entertaining guests at the reception

The women cutting the Mothers Day anniversary cake.
This year’s World Communications Day, the 53rd since its inauguration by Pope Paul VI in 1967 was indeed very unique as all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country were involved in the organization of activities to enhance the communication apostolate of the Church in the country, in conformity with the position of the Universal Church. Prompted by this year’s message for the Holy Father, Pope Francis, communication directorates in the country were vibrant and dynamic in organizing spiritual, Pastoral and educative programmes to mobilize and make every faithful an effective agent of the Church’s communication apostolate, especially through the use of the social media. In most Archdioceses and dioceses, it was a week-long programme of activities featuring lectures, symposia, schools debate and performances by members of the Catholic Association of Entertainers and Artists of Nigeria (CAEAN); culminating in the celebration of the thanksgiving Mass, in most Cathedrals of all the Archdioceses and dioceses on Sunday, June 2nd, where the local ordinaries presided. All homilies and topics for presentations were premised on the theme of the Holy Father’s message for the year: We are members one of another (Eph 4,25). From social network communities to human community.

In his message, Pope Francis called for a more human interpersonal communication in preference to the use of the networking provided by the social media and other instruments of modern media technologies. Leading the nationwide world communications Sunday’s celebration Mass was the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria Chairman for Social Communications and the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha Archdiocese, Most Rev. Denis Isizoh who presided at the celebration of the Mass at St Gabriel Chaplaincy Church, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) Durumi, Abuja; and televised live by the Africa Independent Television (AIT). The Mass was attended by representatives of the media houses based in Abuja.

In his homily Bishop Isizoh reminded Catholic faithful, especially media practitioners that using communication tools to promote division and hatred is not in the interest of the common good of all while positive use of modern instruments of technology are essential for human communal network.

Premising his homily on Pope Francis 2019 message to the Universal Church – We are Members one of another (Eph 4: 25) From social network communities to human community; Bishop Isizoh outlined the reasons for the theme of the Holy Father’s message and spoke extensively on human being in Relation: positive Aspects of the Net; Individualism: Negative Aspects of the Internet; the Holy Father’s guide; the wrong way to go: promoting issues that separate us; Right way to go: emphasizing our shared common Values and the supreme value of physical human encounter. He added that modern day information and media technologies should be used to enhance the building of a well bonded communal humanity where personal encounter as the basis of communication promotes, love, truth and justice.

Bishop Isizoh stated that the message of the Holy Father was to re-emphasize the importance of personal human communication connectivity in comparison to the provisions of the modern day means of social communications which
DIRECTORS FIRST 2019 PLENARY IN MAKURDI IN PICTURES

Directors and Bishops processing for Mass

Bishop Wilfred Anagbe CMF, of Makurdi, presiding at the celebration of the opening Mass. On his right is Bishop Denis Isizoh, Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha and CBCN Social Communications Directorate Chairman; and on his left is Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, CSN Director of Social Communications.

Some of the Directors at the celebration of the Mass.

Cross section of Women Religious Congregations’ Communication Directors during the celebration of the Mass.

Mrs. Lucy Arogundade of CSN accompanied by Miss Fidelia Angbalaga and other lay communicators at the meeting, dancing to the Altar with her birthday thanksgiving gifts.

Bishop Wilfred Anagbe CMF, blessing the celebrant.

Group photograph of the directors with the Bishops, after the celebration of the opening Mass.

The directors arriving at the Se Sugh Maria Pilgrimage Centre in Makurdi.
He added: “The Pope Message resonates with us in Africa our self-isolation, like a web that can entrap us. “

people together. On the other hand, as he notes, the networks networks to break temporal and spatial barriers to bring community; the Pope notes the positive capacity of social (Eph. 4:25): From social network communities to the human world. With the theme, ‘We are members of one another’ message “invites us to reflect on the social media, which has Signis Africa, Rev. Fr. Walter Ihejirika noted that Pope Francis’ of this year’s World Communications Day, the President of In his goodwill message to all communicators on the occasion Speaking at the lecture organized by the Enugu diocesan communications directorate; Rev. Fr. Gerald Musa of the Centre for the Study of African Culture and Communication (SESACC), Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt; noted that the positive use of the social media to promote the truth is the collective responsibility of the society. According to him, the use of the social media and modern media technologies can only be beneficial to humanity if properly and effectively used to promote love and the truth; as well as facilitate a communal human community. However, he noted that at the rate modern means of social communication are being used, these agents of virtual community promote falsehood and untruth to the detriment of the common good of humanity. His lecture was premised on the message of the Holy Father. 

On the role of journalists and media practitioners in the perspective of the Pope’s message, the CIWA lecturer declared: “Professional media practitioners and journalists have greater responsibility in the digital world. In the current information superhighway, people look up to mainstream professional media for clarification, truth, accuracy and objectivity.” He concluded: “if professional media institutions are taken seriously, it is mainly because they verify their news and operate with acceptable ethical standards.”

In his own message, the Director of Social Communications at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu noted that the bond of connectivity is better built and strengthened through human community network and positively impactful than the social networks which are agents of virtual community and tend to promote isolation and spread of falsehood as a result of lack of central control, among other challenges.

He spoke extensively on the message of the Pope, and gave a comparative analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of the human communication network and the web technology network. His words: “We live in an era of internet and many social networks have been creatively developed not only to make communications easier but strengthen human relationships and human community.” He however wondered if the use of the net and social networks today promote human relations community or help destroy it. The CSN Director of Communications went on to outline why the social networks can never be alternative to human community; noting among others that: “The social networks, oftentimes lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights.

In his goodwill message to all communicators on the occasion of this year’s World Communications Day, the President of Signis Africa, Rev. Fr. Walter Ihejirika noted that Pope Francis’ message “invites us to reflect on the social media, which has become one of the remarkable features of our contemporary world. With the theme, ‘We are members of one another’ (Eph. 4:25): From social network communities to the human community; the Pope notes the positive capacity of social networks to break temporal and spatial barriers to bring people together. On the other hand, as he notes, the networks are not synonymous with communities as they can increase our self-isolation, like a web that can entrap us.” He added: “The Pope Message resonates with us in Africa where communalism is a way of life, exhibited by our elastic definition of family: As we celebrate this year’s World Day of Communications, my sincere hope is that the social networks will be a positive asset in the enhancement of family relationships and the building of communities of love and peace in Africa and the whole world.

Bishop Jonas Benson calls for Positive Change and Stability

Bishop Jonas Benson

In Awka Diocese, this year’s World Communications Day celebration was marked in a grand style with programmes organized by the diocesan Social Communications Department of Fides Communications and attended by invited guests, Church and secular media practitioners around the diocesan axis, members of the Catholic Artists and Entertainers Association (CAEAN) and the faithful of the diocese. Highlights of the celebration organized by the director, Rev. Fr. Martin Anusi and his team included: the celebration of the Mass at which the Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Jonas Benson Okoye was the chief celebrant; an interactive session on the Holy Father’s message by top media practitioners in Anambra State and a special thanksgiving by the Fides Staff Welfare Association (FISWA) and media practitioners in Anambra State. The ceremony took place on June 2nd at St. Patrick’s Catholic Cathedral Awka.

In his homily premised on the Pope’s message and the message from the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor and titled: “Disciples, Complete thy Master’s Work”; Bishop Benson Okoye noted that humans are at the centre of God’s creation and it was duty bound for all media practitioners, especially journalists to propagate and finish the gospel of Christ through dissemination of the truth. He urged all to unite, network and form a synergy to fight the social pains,
Archbishop Martins presides in Lagos as Bishop Kukah inagurates CAMPAN in Sokoto

Both the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos and Sokoto Diocese used different landmarks to mark this year’s World Communications Day. While the Local Ordinary of Lagos Archdiocese, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins presided at the celebration of the Mass and in his homily tasked the media to build communities; his Sokoto counterpart, Most Rev. Mathew Hassan Kukah, apart from celebrating the Mass and blessed journalists and media practitioners of Sokoto Diocese with their tools of work but also made a landmark with the inauguration of the Catholic Media Practitioners Association of Nigeria (CAMPAN), Sokoto chapter.

The ceremony in Lagos took place at the Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos, while the 53rd World Communications Day Mass in Sokoto was held at the Holy Family Cathedral Church, Sokoto. Both Prelates spoke extensively on the message of the Holy Father for the day and also reiterated the importance of communication in the life of the Church, the nation and the society; urging journalists in the country to live to expectation by using the social media and other means of communication responsibly for the promotion of peace, love, justice and development.

Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins of Lagos admonished the media to recognize its indispensable role in building a progressive society; urging the country’s journalists and media practitioners to be cautious of their choices and usages of words, images and the content of their output. In his own remarks, the Acting Director of Social Communications in the Archdiocese, Reverend Father Anthony Godonu emphasized that Pope Francis’ message tasked content generators and content consumers of social media, to play a part in bringing people together as a family.

Addressing the media on the importance of the World Communications Day celebration, Fides Communications Director, Fr. Martin Anusi, remarked that the Catholic Church in the entire world from 1967, celebrates World Communications Day because it was a gift to mankind and should be harnessed to meet the objective to build the human community and the human person. Urging the people to make the best use of the opportunity provided by communication, the Fides Director noted that it is to build a healthy human community, and media practitioners should in this perspective, positively help to address the challenges facing the country.  

Story by Mercy Hill
DIRECTORS FIRST 2019 PLENARY IN MAKURDI IN PICTURES

The high table during the opening prayer for the official opening ceremony of the Plenary.

L-R: Rev. Fr. Egere Inaku of CESACC, CIWA, Port Harcourt; Rev. FR. Chris Anyanwu, CSN Director of Social Communications; Directorate of Social communications Episcopal Chairman; Bishop Denis Isizoh and the association’s deputy Chairperson. Rev. Sr. Josephine Odorwike.

Some of the Female Religious Groups, association communication directors; during the opening ceremony

Cross section priests/Religious communication directors at the opening ceremony.

Mr. Julius Atorough, addressing the directors on: Market journalism: An Essential Tool in selling Church Brand.

Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, moderating the lecture of Dr. Mrs. Janet Asagh of NCC.

Cultural dancers entertaining guests at the opening ceremony.

Group photograph of Bishop Chairman, Most Rev. Denis Isizoh (4th from left), with members of the high table. On his right is the representative of Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State.
Bishop Hilary Okeke advocates honest use of Social Media

The celebration of this year’s World Communications Day ceremony of Nnewi Diocese was marked with the celebration of the Mass and a discussion programme premised on the message of the Holy Father Pope Francis, and attended by members of the various secular media houses in the area, invited dignitaries and Catholic perspective of the church they give in their reports. Bishop Kukah also participated in a seminar organized by CAMPAN to mark the world communication day during which he gave the keynote address in which he urged the Sokoto Chapter of CAMPAN to train Lectors in deaneries and parishes on proper communication apostolate to benefit worshippers at Mass. He also directed the association to ensure proper training of those who handle public address systems in all the parishes in Sokoto Diocese. An official of the Laity Council, Dr. Gerald Onwuka presented a paper on the theme of the World Communication Day.

Officers of the newly inaugurated diocesan CAMPAN are: Mr. Nnodi Patrick Chikaadinaka, chairman; Mr. Benedict Udoh, vice chairman; Patience Chukwu, secretary; Abraham Oche Idakpo, financial Secretary/Treasurer; Mr. Andrew Zomo, Welfare/ Provost and Wisdom Okeiyi, Public Relations Officer.

Media practitioners and lay faithful of the diocese.

The con-celebrated Mass was presided over by Very Rev Anichebe Ezeobata, while the Vicar General of the diocese, Very Rev Msgr Anichebe Patrick Ezeobata preached the homily delivering the message of the local ordinary, Most Rev. Hilary Okeke to the congregation. In his message, the bishop premising his call on the Holy Father’s message urged Christians to use the social media to disseminate the truth and avoid fake news and hate speech. While appreciating the immense potentialities of the internet for the advancement of the cause of mankind, the Bishop regretted that some people have exploited it and other social media technology in the negative to spread fake news, citing the denial of the molestation of a Catholic priest of Nnewi Diocese by IPOB as evidence of dishonesty. Other priests who co-concelebrated the Mass were: Rev Frs Donatus Ike; Alphonsus Gusiorah; Martin Onwudiwe; Chidiebere Ughaerumba; Michael Njogobi; and Maurice Okeke, the Cathedral Administrator.

Bishop Isizoh in his address stated that the Catholic Church recognizes the work of media practitioners who educate the public about events and issues, and called on all to use the internet freely, justly, judiciously, and responsibly to build up human community. He also called for the recognition and appreciation of the achievements of the Communications media.

In his welcome address, the diocesan Director of Communications, Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Martin Onwudiwe noted that the advent of the internet is a blessing to humanity through its numerous advantages, stating that the Church is very wise in harnessing these advantages in her mission of evangelization. He however called for a healthy application of the internet services, but avoiding the negative use of the technology which lead to insecurity, lack of empathy, falsehood, insensitivity, cyber bullying, loneliness and distraction.

The event also featured live performance by the Orchestra Band of St Paul’s Seminary, Ukpor.
**WCD 2019:**
**Oyo Diocese organizes Seminar on News Writing**

The Catholic Diocese of Oyo joined the rest of the world to celebrate the 53rd World Communications Day with the theme “We are members one of another. (Eph. 4:25). From Network Communities to Human Community”. The day which was observed with seminar topics “Uses of Church's Gadgets and Announcement; News Writing Practical, and Photography” was organized by the Social Communications Department at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Maryland, Ogbomosho between 30th May and June 1st, 2019.

In his welcome address, the Dean of Ogbomoso deanery, Rev. Fr. Francis Femi Oladipo stated that communication has been in existence since the creation of the world as it constitutes a way of sharing ideas between people in the church and society. He maintained that one of the best gifts of God to mankind is internet which the Catholic Church has been using to promote positive human relations that would lead to building real communities with human faces not totally replacing face-to-face human interactions.

In his presentation on the “Use of Church Gadgets and Announcement”, Rev Fr Benjamin Jolasun, stated that...
DIRECTORS FIRST 2019 PLENARY IN MAKURDI IN PICTURES

Cross section of the communication directors during one of the lecture sessions.

The host Director, Rev. Fr. Moses Iorapuu and the Vice President of the association, Rev. Sr. Josephine Odorwike.

Cross section of CAMPAN members at the programme.

The high table during one of the lecture sessions.

Host director, Rev. Fr. Moses Iorapuu appreciating one of the speakers, Dr. Mrs. Janet Asagh with a gift.

Cross section of the directors at one of the sessions.

Rev. Fr. Jude Orah (right) and Mr Reuben Brodrick displaying the Plaque won by the Benin Archdiocesan newspaper. In the middle in Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu

Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu (right), congratulating Rev. Fr. Mose Iorapuu and his team for Plaque won by the Star Newspaper of Makurdi Diocese.
Catholic communicators must thoroughly assess every information and be fully prepared before presenting it to the congregation. He added that church’s gadgets are vital keys to good worship in the celebration of Holy Mass.

Speaking on photography, another speaker, Mr Faseyiro, noted that photography is not just about snapping pictures or taking shots to distract people during Mass or other Church programmes, but rather about right positioning, calculative bearing and maintenance of balance. He took participants through a practical session to buttress his points.

In her own lecture on “News writing, practical and video streaming”, the Director, Social Communications Commission, Oyo Diocese, Sr. Eunice Ikufisile (OSF), noted that news writing is a must skill for all communicators in the society and the Church. Sr. Eunice stated that information sharing from parishes requires proactive smartness and painstaking reportage without distorting the real message. She also spoke on ‘live streaming’ of events on social media, stressing that: “As Parish communicators, we must learn to write well and follow the basic elements of good writing; which means our writing must be simple, direct, clear, brief and must have life.”

The diocesan celebration was rounded up with the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass held on Sunday, 2nd June at Our Lady of the Assumption Cathedral, Asogo, Oyo by the Cathedral Administrator, Very Rev. Fr John Oyekunle who represented the Catholic Bishop of Oyo Diocese, Most Rev. Emmanuel Ade Badejo.

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**Ilorin Diocese celebrates World Communications Day with the Inauguration of CAMPAN and CAEAN**

The Catholic Media Practitioners Association of Nigeria (CAMPAN), Ilorin Diocese chapter has elected officers to run the affairs of the association in the diocese. The election which took place during the general meeting of the body at the Diocesan Communications Centre, Ilorin, was moderated by the Diocesan Director of Communications, Rev. Fr. Christopher Atoyebi. Officers elected are James: ‘Yemi Adurotoye, President; Comrade Olaolu Ajayi, Vice President; Mrs. Margaret Innocent, Secretary General; Seyi Olarewaju, Treasurer; George Oyeyiola, Public Relations Officer.

In his acceptance speech, ‘Yemi Adurotoye, the newly elected President, enjoined members for their unflinching support and implored everyone to brace up for the task ahead in ensuring the association take firm root in the diocese. In his own address, the diocesan Director of Communications, Fr. Atoyebi advised CAMPAN members to remain steadfast in the proclamation of the faith, adding that media remains a veritable means of carrying out the great commission.

In its celebration of the 2019 World Communications Day, the diocese had a Thanksgiving Mass at St Joseph’s Cathedral Church during which media practitioners and journalists in the state capital and their tools were blessed. Both the Catholic Media Practitioners Association of Nigeria (CAMPAN) and the Catholic Artistes and Entertainers of Nigeria (CAEAN), were officially inaugurated at the celebration of the Mass. Other highlights included interactive sessions by journalists and media practitioner in the diocese with the Bishop, priests and other invited guests, at a ceremony held in the hall of the Cathedral Church.
In continuation of his efforts at making the communication associations in the country more vibrant and effective, the CBCN Chairman for Social Communications and Auxiliary Bishop for Onitsha Archdiocese, Most Rev. Denis Isizoh in Awka Anambra State held a meeting with representatives of the executive of the Catholic Media Practitioners Association of Nigeria (CAMPAN).

The meeting which took place at the Best Western Meloch Hotels, Awka, Anambra State; had the President of the association Mr. Patrick Osu, National President, and Mr. Peter Dada, National Secretary in attendance. Also present were: Mrs. Ekwi Ajide, National Public Relations 2; Mr. Philip Toryue, National Financial Secretary; Mr. Ifeanyichukwu Polycarp and Mr. Okpalanzie.

Addressing the leaders of the association, Bishop Isizoh advised Catholic Media Practitioners to sustain the ethics and integrity of the profession by reporting positive developments about the Church and the country. They were also urged to always investigate very well before publishing to ensure the dissemination of the truth and correct news, giving fair opportunities to all parties involved in the incident reported; especially sensitive news matters.

He stressed the need for care and restraint while reporting sensitive issues, noting that journalists must seek to balance their reports in the spirit of fair hearing and promotion of justice to the concerned parties. He added that every country in the world has both negative and positive developments, but journalists’ reports are usually based on individual's perceptions of issues.

The Bishop Chairman called for the establishment of a national or regional newspapers for the Church in the country, instead of the present trend of each diocese floating its own newspaper. He also advised the association to establish an on-line newspaper with a website that can be read all over the world with fewer personnel being involved.

The exco members led by the President of the association, Mr. Patrick Osu, briefed the Bishop Chairman on the activities of the association since they came to office; the challenges faced and efforts made at ensuring collaboration with other affiliate communication bodies of the Church in the country. Among other things, the officers briefed and got the approval of the Bishop Chairman on the association's planned national convention and appointment of patrons and patronesses for the body.
Lagos Communications
Team visits Fides office

The Communications Department of the Archdiocese of Lagos in June 2019, paid a two-day visit to Fides Communications, Awka, Anambra State; to understudy Fides Communications' modus operandi and to discuss what and how Fides operates as part of their efforts to re-strategize communications in the Archdiocese. The team of four was led by Sir Anthony Chiejina (Chief Corporate Communications Officer of Dangote Groups), who is Chairman of the Committee on Communications set up by the Archbishop to re-evaluate communications apostolate in Lagos archdiocese, and Rev. Fr Anthony Godonu (Communications Director of the Archdiocese of Lagos). Others are Mr. Patrick Adaba and Sir Philip Obioha.

Addressing the group during the interactive session at the Fidesplex, the Fides Communications Director, Fr. Martin Anusi, welcomed the guests and gave them a brief history of Fides, explaining its units, services, online presence and Google experiences. He said that Fides was outstanding for its uniqueness, grassroots orientation, pastoral, ecumenical and independent outlook. He further said that Fides was much more than a newspaper, noting that it was conceived as multi-media project with multiple units that cut across printing, publishing, audio-visual, research-documentation, photo/video, pastoral outreach, internet/e-evangelization, youth development, farms/fishery, professional engagements, among others. The interactive session between the two delegations was very insightful, interesting and very beneficial.

Story by Mercy Hill
CATHOLIC DOCTORS ALERT ON CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG ADDICTION

Drug addiction has taken a new and alarming dimension in Nigeria, and has been ascribed as a major factor for the high rate of suicide being committed presently in the country. This assertion was made by the members of the Catholic Health Practitioners of Nigeria, in a communique issued at the end of the association’s 14th Annual Scientific Conference, held at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Kofo Abayomi Street, Victoria Island, Lagos in July; had: Effects of Drug Addiction on Integral Human Development as its theme.

The communique, signed by Dr. Emmanuel Okechukwu National President of the association and Dr. Patrick Ijewere, the Archdiocesan Chairman of the Lagos Chapter, outlined the challenges of the medical challenge on the country and the family and offered ways on how it could be addressed to minimize and eradicate this dangerous societal malady.

According to the Catholic doctors, drug addiction has multi-dimensional effects on the family and the society adding that it has become an epidemic ravaging Nigerians of all ages, including pupils and students of primary and secondary schools as well as those of higher institutions. They therefore called for a collaboration among all stakeholder groups in the country to put an end to this endemic situation. They advised all Nigerians, especially medical practitioners and parents to step up the fight against drug abuse through targeted education and close relationship with their children and wards.

Pointing out that the upsurge in suicide among Nigerians is among other things, fueled by drug addiction and substance abuse; the doctors noted that the impact addiction can have on integral human development is that life can become meaningless with suicide becoming an attractive option for the victims. They noted that drug abusers need compassion and humane care adding that stigmatization and discrimination “are not Christian attitudes towards them”; as these could worsen their situation.

While admonishing medical practitioners and other health personnel to look at healthcare services from a wellness perspective, the doctors called on Catholic health care delivery providers to be firmly grounded in the teachings of the Catholic Church on matters of medical bioethics in face of technological progress which may promote practices that are contrary to moral law. In the same vein, they urged them to be educated on the pro-life culture and family planning methods in the concept of the Catholic Church teaching.

The body also appealed to the government on vital areas that need the crucial attention of the government on the provision of good healthcare delivery services for all classes of Nigerians as well as ensuring that government agencies responsible for control and services in all health matters live up to expectation in the performance of their official duties; especially in drug abuse and addiction related matters.

Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza
CBCN Health Committee Chairman

Cardinal John Onaiyekan performing imposition of hands rite on the Msgr Patrick Eluke. Lookin on approvingly is the President of the CBCN, Archbishop Augustine Akubeze of Benin City.
CATHOLIC CARITAS FOUNDATION OF NIGERIA (CCFN)

News Magazine

Compiled by Dr Justin Ekpa
Caritas Nigeria participated in a three-day workshop of the Caritas Africa Human Mobility Reference Group from July 8 -10, 2019, to develop a Human Mobility implementation/strategic plan for the African region. The event had in attendance 18 participants drawn from Caritas Africa Member Organizations and its partners (Carias Internationalis, Caritas Europa and Cordaid).

At the event, participants working together in big and smaller teams reviewed the Human Mobility situation in Africa (based on the study report), brainstormed on solutions and crafted a sustainable strategy for developing interventions. The workshop also provided an opportunity for participants and CA member organizations to understand what their mother body is doing and draw valuable knowledge that would make them work better in their local organizations.
As part of her efforts towards contributing to quality education in the society, Caritas Nigeria undertook the distribution of 1,310 branded school bags to 466 pupils of St. Peter’s Primary School 1, Adagom, 519 pupils of St. Peter’s Primary School 2, Adagom, and 325 pupils of St. Eugene’s Primary School, Okende, all in Ogoja. The activity occurred on May 23, 2019.

In addition to providing the children with the option of keeping their books safe, especially from the rain, the bags will prompt the beneficiaries’ parents/guardians to buy them relevant aids for their academics.

The children, who were visibly overwhelmed with joy for the gesture, chorused cheerfully, “Thank you, Caritas! Thank you, Caritas!!”, as they ran off with their bags, some into their classes; others to show the bags to their class teachers, parents/guardians.
CARITAS NIGERIA HOSTS OTHER IPS IN THE CDC-SPONSORED DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Caritas Nigeria played host to four other Implementing Partners (IPs) working with CDC on the Nigeria HIV response for a 5 day workshop on Data Analysis and Report Writing for Qualitative Research August 26 – 30, 2019. Most public health research are “Quantitative” – focusing on numbers and proportions of a particular expectation or research question. While very important, Quantitative research has limitations in terms of painting a representative picture of unique context and depth of any public health issue or intervention. This is the basis for this training, to improve programing and derive better insights from ongoing interventions. CDC supports 19 states in Nigeria through her 4 IPs namely – APIN Public Health Initiatives, Center for Integrated Health Projects (CIHP), Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) and Caritas Nigeria. CDC was represented by 7 CDC Nigeria staff and two CDC HQ (Atlanta staff), who also provided facilitation for the event.

Caritas Nigeria representatives at the workshop L-R Dr Lanre Olayiwola, Dr Wale Fadare, Victor Enejoh, Ify Tonye-Monye

CDC facilitators flanked by Participants at the training workshop

CDC facilitators flanked by Participants at the training workshop
Catholic Lawyers advocate holistic approach to solve Nigeria’s problems

The Association of Catholic Lawyers of Nigeria, met in Abuja for the 2019 national Executive Council Meeting and Colloquium on the state of the Nigerian nation as well as the role of the association in the Church in Nigeria. The ceremony took place at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja.

At the end of the meeting, the lawyers issued a communiqué in which they called for an all stakeholders interface meeting to holistically address the challenges militating against the enthronement of good governance in the country. The communiqué issued at the end of the meeting and signed by Barristers Chukwuma Ezeala and Angela Odunukwe, President and Secretary of the association respectively. Calling for affirmative actions in this direction, the association listed the groups that should take part in the interface discussion to include: Christian Lawyers; Muslim Lawyers, other relevant stakeholders, institutions and organizations.

Other resolutions adopted by the body included: creation of awareness and efforts towards building bridges of peace, harmony and social cohesion as well as how “to embrace core values in governance and well-being of the Nigerian State so as to jettison the primordial ethnic cleavages that have always held us down as Nigerians”.

They then called on the Federal Government to revitalize the entire security structure of the country and make it technology driven to save lives in the overall interest of the Nigerian State and her citizenry; adding that the fight against corruption needs to be tackled and dispatched holistically. During the Colloquium, the lawyers deliberated extensively on: the rule of law and transparency in which they observed that these cardinal virtues and norms are substantially lacking in facets of life and governance in the country.

Also present at the meeting/colloquium were: the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Dr. Augustine Akubeze and Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Benin City; John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese; Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso, Chairman Department of Church and Society, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), and Archbishop of Kaduna Archdiocese; Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah, of Sokoto Diocese and Bishop Anselm Umorem, Auxiliary Bishop of Abuja Archdiocese.

The programme was attended by Catholic lawyers from eight of the nine Provinces of the Church in the country - Abuja, Benin, Calabar, Jos, Kaduna, Lagos, Onitsha and Owerri. Senior Lawyers in attendance; included: Dr. Theo C. Osanakpo, SAN, KSGG, KCSGG, Mr. Augustine Alege, SAN - former President of NBA, Senator Mike Ajegbo, CON, Mr Ben Anachebe, SAN – Chairman of the NACL Board of Trustees, Prof Maxwell Gidado, SAN, Professor Paul Idornigie, SAN and Professor Eric Okojie.
CSN PLATFORM

CSN organizes Orientation Programme for Laity Groups Chaplains

In June this year, newly appointed National Chaplains and Sister Advisors to the various laity groups of the Church in the country attended an orientation programme organized by the Pastoral Agents Department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), to sensitize them and acquaint them with their responsibilities to the various church groups they are to minster to as chaplains. The programme took place at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja. The programme which started with an opening Mass was concluded with a closing Mass at which the Catholic Bishop of Otukpo Diocese, Most Rev. Michael Apochi, presided. During the duration of the orientation programme, the Chaplains and Sister Advisors were educated on their statutory responsibilities.

In his address at the opening ceremony, Bishop Michael Apochi who is the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Chairman for Pastoral Agents Department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria outlined the invaluable roles of the chaplains in their apostolate; stressing: “The lay faithful shall use the services you shall render to them in various societies and organizations which they belong in the Church to enhance the quality of their Christian life.” He urged them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the training programme to enhance their apostolate and participate actively to enable them serve the lay faithful effectively to the greater glory of God.

Addressing the Chaplains and Sister Advisors on their statutory responsibilities, the CSN director of Pastoral Agents, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu spoke extensively on the vision of the Church in respect of this apostolate outlining the objectives and the mission of the Church premised on evangelization; responsibility, missionary mandate and character which premised on witnessing. He used several references from the teachings of the Church, the Bible and other documents of the Church to buttress his points.

Other areas of focus in the director’s paper included the roles of Chaplains and Sister Advisors, expectations of their apostolate and what they are not expected to be or do in the discharge of their duties. According to Fr. Dugu, Chaplains and Sister Advisors are primarily Spiritual Directors of the lay faithful, caring for their spiritual and psychological needs, guiding, teaching, sanctifying, governing, admonishing, exhorting, mentoring, comforting and reprimanding them when they are about to falter.

The CSN director noted that chaplains and Sisters Advisors have invaluable roles to play in shaping the spiritual and pastoral lives of the members of the lay faithful groups they administer adding that they are also expected to guide the faithful in the realization of the vision and mission of each sodality group and organization, and how this fits into the vision of the Church; along with promoting the apostolate and charism of each group.

They are expected to foster the spiritual growth of the lay faithful, encourage honesty, accountability, transparency, unity and peace, equality and civilization of love. They are also, among others to facilitate cordial relationship between the laity and the hierarchy of the Church. Fr. Dugu also outlined the don’ts of the chaplains and Sister Advisors which include: non control of the day-to-day running of the association; not presiding over meeting, though ensuring celebration of the Mass, Recitation of the Rosary before the start of every meeting.

The chaplains are also not expected to take decisions unilaterally over issues of the associations nor have the sole authority to suspend or dismiss any member of the associations; avoid sectionalism, tribalism or partisanship; and avoid materialism, seek undue favours and benefits or compromise their position.

In his homily at the closing Mass, Bishop Apochi enjoined the national chaplains and Sister Advisors to remain steadfast in their apostolate of leading the various groups of the laity in the Church spiritually and pastorally in conformity with the teachings and values of the Church. In this perspective, they were urged to emulate St Paul by imbibing the spirit of courage and dedication under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The programme which was attended by about 30 Chaplains and Sister advisors from different parts of the country, featured paper presentations by experts in different areas of the roles, needs and expectations of
Seminary Rectors attend Training Workshop in Onitsha

Rectors of Major and Minor Seminaries in the country, recently gathered at the St Gabriel Spiritual Year Seminary, Ozubulu, Anambra State, for a workshop organized by the Pastoral Agents department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN). In attendance were rectors of all the Major and minor seminaries in all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country, along with Most Rev. Valerian Okeke, Archbishop of Onitsha Archdiocese and CBCN Bishop Chairman for Seminary Committee; Most Rev. Hilary Okeke, of Nnewi Diocese.

Addressing the rectors, CSN director of Pastoral Agents department, Rev. Fr. Isaac Dugu, noted that: “Given the rapid evolution in all facets of our modern society, our young brothers in the formation need some guide and proper orientation”. He therefore admonished the rectors to remain steadfast in their mission of mentoring future priests for the Church in Nigeria, in spite of the challenges of modernity and other factors facing the Church in this perspective.

Pointing out that this responsibility of the rectors is not a mean task, Fr. Dugu stated that “the task comes with a monumental responsibility but flickered with amazing Grace from God in the face of very obvious hazards and challenges emerging daily from the trends of modernity, relativism, widespread sycophancy, political profligacy, moral decay, sexual evolution, ethnic and religious bigotry,” among others.

While commending the rectors for their invaluable role in their vocation of training and making seminarians worthy servants of Christ as priests in the Lord’s vineyard, the CSN director described them as noble people stressing that: “The Church in Nigeria and the Universal Church depend on you in the training and mentoring of future priests who are sound, deep in faith, rich in wisdom, proven integrity and full of the Holy Spirit to witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Fr Dugu noted that the workshop has far more reaching significance, as it is not only to edify the knowledge of the rectors, but also inculcate the values of effective mentoring leadership toward the promotion of Christian values in the minds of the seminarians as they discern their vocation. He added: “In our society where the word politics has a bad name, --- our seminarians must be informed that Jesus taught his disciples to be leaders who must have character and values and that a leader must strive to change attitude and traditions that are inimical to Christian values that can transform the world for good.”

Archbishop Valerian Okeke
Onitsha Archdiocese

HOLD NIGERIA’S SECULAR STATE SACROSANCT; GOVERNMENT TOLD

The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN) has called on the tiers of government to hold sacrosanct the secular state of the country and avoid favouring any religion at the expense of others. The call was contained in the communique issued at the end of the 141st National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of the Council held at the Bishop Thomas McGettrick Pastoral Centre, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The theme of the meeting which was attended by delegates from all over the country was: Islamization and Fulanization of Nigeria: The Role of the Church. The communique was signed by Sir Thomas Folu Adekoya KSJI and Hon. Sir Henry H. Yunkwap KSJI, President and National Secretary-General of the Council, respectively.

Emphasizing the need to respect the secular state of the country as contained in the country’s 1999 Constitution, the association noted that: “the agitation for the establishment of settlements by the government for a tribe in all the states of the Federation” must be resisted, because responding positively to such a parochial request by any particular tribe, religion, group or trade could threaten the corporate existence of the Nigerian nation. The council noted with great concern the worrisome state of insecurity in the country and the inability of the country’s security agencies...
Ignited by the outcome of the recent National Catechetical Summit, the Religious Education office of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria has taken up the challenge of taking Catechesis to formation houses, thus multiplying not just agents for catechesis but making those who are going to follow the new paradigm shift; from catechesis of ‘information’ to a catechesis to both inform and form people in faith.

The mobile Catechetical programme has been taken to the formation house of the Daughters of Charity (Eleme, Umunede and Abuja) to the Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel (Ado Ekiti), Society of Mother of Peace (at SMP Monastery, Umuchukwu, Anambra), Christ the King Seminary (Kafanchan) Sisters of Sacred Heart (Benin-City). Apart from Formation houses, some dioceses and organizations were also visited on this same drive. This included the Abuja Senatus of the Legio Mariae.

The whole idea is to go beyond the ‘who made you’ catechesis and the instructors were the first concern, if they get it right, the delivery will be right and proper Christians are formed. The course outline includes:

Part 1: Understanding Catechesis
- what is Catechesis
- Nature of Catechesis
- Mind of the Church on Catechesis
- Object of Catechesis
- The Tasks

Part 2: Doing Catechesis
- Methodology
- Class Catch: Children, Adolescent, Young People, Young Adult, Adult and Varia

Part 3: R.C.I.A.
- What it is
- Component parts
- Rites

Part 4: Biblical Catechesis
- Catechetical Initiation to the Bible
- Lectio Divina

This Unit is ready to assist any diocese in the area of training of personnel at no cost but in the spirit of New Evangelization.
Cardinal Turkson of the Vatican arriving for the celebration of the opening Mass in Cote D’Ivoire. On his left is RECOWA- CERAO President, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama.

The Bishops in the procession to the Altar for the celebration of the opening Mass.

The President of Cote D’Ivoire Félix Houphouët-Boigny and his wife at the opening Mass.

The chief celebrant and President of the Conference, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama blessing the faithful during the procession to the Altar.

Cross section of the Bishops during the celebration of the Mass.

Another cross section of the Bishops at the opening Mass.

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

Group photograph of the Bishops, after the celebration of the Mass.
THIRD RECWOWA-CERAO PLENARY IN PICTURES

The President, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, (third from right) presiding at one of the sessions.

Cross session of the Bishops and other guests at the opening ceremony.

Cross section of the Bishops at the opening ceremony.

Some members of the Nigerian delegation at the Conference. Third from left is Archbishop Augustine Akubeze, CBCN President.

John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja and Bishop Martin Olorunmolu of Lokoja discussing a matter of interest.

Cross section of the Bishops at the opening ceremony.

Traditional dancers entertaining the Bishops at the opening ceremony.
CSN PLATFORM

MISSION & DIALOGUE DEPARTMENT

CSN organizes Orientation Programme for Priests/Religious going on Mission

In continuation of the formation of Priests and religious going on mission outside the country, the Mission Unit of the Mission and Dialogue department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), in May 2019 organized an orientation programme for about 18 Priests and Religious going on mission outside the country.

Speaking on the importance of the orientation programme, the CSN Director of Mission and Dialogue, Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomwhange SMA, noted that the training programme, which is a continuous exercise organised by the Catholic Secretariat was to enable those going on mission to be acquainted with the way of life, culture and tradition of the areas where they are going on mission; and at the same time mobilize them to be good ambassadors of the Church and the nation in their countries of mission.

The programme which took place at the Pope John Paul Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, Benue State from May 13 – 20, 2019, was attended by five priests, 12 Religious and one Seminarian from some of the dioceses in the country. The participants were lectured on different aspects of mission and areas of interest related to their apostolate.

Speakers at the one week programme included: Rev. Fr. Joseph Nomwhange SMA, CSN Director of Mission and Dialogue and Rev. Fr. Gregory Obanado, CSN Secretary for Dialogue unit in the department of Mission and Dialogue; Other speakers were: Rev. Fr. Moses Iorapuu, Director of Communication, Makurdi Diocese; and Msgr. Michael Sasa, the Makurdi diocesan Director of Pontifical Mission Societies, (PMS). The programme was attended by Sisters of Daughters of Charity (DC), Daughters of Divine Love (DDL); Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HHCJ) and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Congregations.

Bishop Hilary Okeke
Nnewi Diocese

CWO Honours Sr. Clare Emeruom In Abuja

The Catholic Women Organization of Nigeria (CWON) of Abuja Archdiocese, recently in Abuja gave an award of recognition to Rev. Sr. Clare Emeruom, the Secretary to the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) and director of Opus Securitatis Office of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). The ceremony which took place in Abuja was witnessed by the Metropolitan of Abuja Archdiocese, John Cardinal Onaiyekan and other dignitaries and well-wishers. The award – GOLD PILLAR AWARD – was in recognition of her invaluable support for the Cor Mariae Boys College project of the association, Abuja and activities of the association, especially in Abuja Archdiocese.

L-R: Rev. Sr. Clare Emeruom receiving the Award; the Award and with John Cardinal Onaiyekan and other guests, after receiving the award.

DOUBLE HONOUR FOR SIR GODWIN UKEL

The Auditor of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Sir Godwin Ukel, recently added two new feathers to his life success story in the academic world as well as in the Catholic Church. In the academic world, he was recently inducted as full member of the Institute of Directors of Nigeria, after successfully fulfilling the required academic requisitions. And in the Catholic Church, Sir Ukel and his wife had their investiture as 2nd degree Knights of the Honoured Order of the Knights of St. Mulumba.
Activities for the 2019 Extraordinary Mission Month celebration as directed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis has begun in earnest at both the local, national, continental and international level. According to the programme of the Universal Church, the Colloquium for Africa took place in Zambia from July 28 to August 3rd. With the Nigerian National Director of Pontifical Mission Societies and the President of the African body, Rev. Fr. George Olusegun Ajana in attendance. Speakers at the well-attended programme were drawn from different parts of the continent.

In Nigeria, several activities were put in place by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) Nigeria for Archdioceses and Diocese; as well as all the affiliate bodies of the office like; Holychildhood and Young Missionary Movement of Nigeria. The Catholic Diocese of Pankshin, in Plateau State also organized a workshop to respond to the call of the Holy Father for the special celebration to mark the Centenary of the Apostolic letter MAXIMUM ILLUD, issued by Pope Benedict XV on 30/11/1919. The programme was facilitated by Rev. Fr George Olusegun Ajana, the National Director of PMS in Nigeria and the National Coordinator of Missio Invest Africa. The priests, religious and laity of the diocese was attended by the local ordinary, Bishop Michael Gobal Gokum.

The workshop was to enlighten the participants on the Extra-Ordinary Missionary Month and the facilitator, Rev. Fr. George Ajana in his presentation outlined the four dimensions articulated and agreed upon by the National Directors at their meeting held in Rome 2017 for missionary activities in respect of the celebration. The four thrust areas are: Personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, Word of God and Prayer; Knowing the witnesses of Saints and Martyrs; Priests, Religious and Laity are encouraged to have an ongoing formation on the Bible, Catechism, spirituality and theology and lastly Missionary charity. Fr. Ajana concluded his presentation by saying, “we are a mission, so everybody should discover his/her mission”.

The PMS National Director also used the occasion to educate the participants on the societies that make up the Pontifical Missionary Societies (PMS); stating that this comprised of: the Propagation of Faith (POF); Missionary Childhood (Holy Childhood Association (HCA); Pontifical Society of Peter the Apostle (POSPA) and the Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU).

He elaborated on the roles and activities of each association, saying that they have a strong bond with Rome. Fr. Ajana therefore called for prompt obedience to the church’s hierarchy adding that PMS fosters a universal spirit as against being narrow minded.

Speaking to CSN News Magazine on the activities for the extraordinary month celebration, the National PMS Director for Nigeria, Rev. Fr. George Ajana disclosed that activities for the celebration will take place at the diocesan, provincial and national levels and culminate in the celebration of the Mission Sunday Mass in October, at which money will be collected as usual for the support of the Holy Father Pope Francis, for the Universal Church’s propagation apostolate, especially in countries where vocation is threatened as well as where poverty is affecting the growth of the Church.
HOLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION DELEGATES ASSEMBLE IN UYO

The Pontifical Mission Societies PMS) Nigeria, continue the activities marking the Extraordinary Mission Month celebration with the gathering of over 250 delegates of Holy Childhood Association (HCA), from all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, for the 2019 national HCA programme. The theme for the celebration was: Singing the Mission. In the words of Rev. Fr. George Ajana, the National PMS Director; the extraordinary mission month has become pertinent that “our children, members of the Holy Childhood Association should be part of it, that is why we are joining the Universal Church in Singing the Mission. This is our own little way of participating in “Baptised and Sent; The Church of Christ on Mission in the World”.

Declaring the programme open, Bishop John Ayah urged members of the Holy Childhood Association to embrace and grow true Catholic way of life, so that they can grow in the faith and impact Christian values on the society. He noted that the Holy Childhood Association is a medium where Catholic children all over the country participate and learn more about being missionaries for Christ.

The Bishop continued: “The Church has come to stay in our own land, within our own cultural milieu and so in that way we can interact within our own culture and so we speak in a language we all understand ourselves, express ourselves within the cultural setting we find ourselves and through that way we manage to bring Christ to our brothers and sisters.

Bishop Ayah thanked the priests, religious and animators who have accepted the apostolate of working and nurturing the children. He added: “You need to be very dedicated and down to earth to be able to work with children”. He stated further that the fathers have to become like a biological fathers to the children and in like manner, the Rev. Sisters like their biological mothers.

The local ordinary of Uyo Diocese urged them to lead the children to God, teach them to Know and honour God in their lives. He advised them not to be too hard on them, nor be too harsh on them but to understand them. They are all growing children, very intelligent children with very sharp ears and study minds.

In his own address, the PMS National Director, Rev. Fr. George Ajana disclosed that the Holy Father, Pope Francis has declared that this year 2019, the faithful shall celebrate the Extraordinary Missionary month October 2019; and Catholics all over the world are expected to participate actively.

He added: “The extraordinary mission month has become pertinent that our children, members of the Holy Childhood association should be part of it, that is why we are joining the Universal Church in “Singing the Mission” this is our own little way of participating in “Baptised and Sent The Church of Christ on Mission in the World”. He added that the society of the Missionary Childhood Association in a special way leads children to discover the missionary spirit and teach them to help children of their own age around the world through prayer and small material sacrifice.

The opening ceremony was also attended by the Deputy Governor of Akwa Ibom State Moses Frank Ekpo and the Secretary to the State Government Dr. Emmanuel Ekuwem along with chaplains and ..... of the various Archdioceses and dioceses.
“Celebration Extraordinary Mission Month Aimed An Reinvigorating Our Spiritual Life”

The Catholic Bishop of Jalingo, Most Rev. Charles Hammawa has described the celebration of this year’s extraordinary Mission month of October, as directed by the Holy Father Pope Francis as an opportunity to rediscover our personal mandate missionary mandate, as given to each and every one of us by Jesus Christ. Through Baptism, this is to enable us to up this challenge more seriously and be more committed in our missionary activities. According to the Bishop, one of the ways to live out the extraordinary mission month is the personal encounter with Christ. While urging the young ones to foster their missionary life anywhere they find themselves, Bishop Hammawa admonished them to use the national mission congress of their association in Jalingo to move closer to God and live the life of holiness, paying little attention to social life. He advised them to encounter Christ while they are here and embrace simplicity of life to enhance their holiness of life.

In his own address, the national Director of the Pontifical Missionary Societies, Rev. Fr. George Ajana told the participants at the program that the Pope has made it clear that “the Church needs men and women, who, by virtue of Baptism, respond generously to the call to leave behind home, family, country, language and local Church, and to be sent forth to the nations, to a world not yet transformed, by the Sacraments of Jesus Christ and his Church.” He therefore urged them to use the opportunity of the congress to identify their roles as youths in the evangelization apostolate of the Church and resolve to play their roles willingly and diligently, as they have been called to do.

In his welcome address, the National Coordinator of the programme, Mr. Peter Adubi reminded the members of the message of the Holy Father to the youths of the world during the last World Youth Day, adding that the theme for this year’s celebration is centred on Mission which is the identity of the members as missionaries.

This year’s YOM congress, which had: The Role of young people in Evangelization; Celebrating the Extra Ordinary Mission month (Baptised and Sent), took place in Jalingo, Taraba State. The one-week programme which started with the celebration of the Mass, was held at the St Charles Borromeo Pastoral Centre. It also included many spiritual and pastoral programmes and was attended by over 250 delegates from different parts of the country, including diocesan coordinators and officers of the national office.
The Michaelian Family “Gboluwaga” Programme: HELPING THE EVANGELIZATION APOSTOLATE OF THE SMA SISTERS

By Rev. Sr. Rose Aluko

The Michaelian Family is an association of lay associates of the Sister of the St Michael the Archangel Congregation and was founded by Most Rev Michael Olutunji Fagun, the emeritus Bishop of Ekiti Diocese. The special outreach ceremony of this group in collaboration with the Rev. Sisters occurred in Abuja. The Gboluwaga programme was attended by the Sisters and the Michaelian family in their House of Perpetual Help Catholic Church.

What brought about the Michaelian Family?

The Michaelian Family of the Sisters of Saint Michael the Archangel came into existence following the invitation of Christ to all nations to evangelize to them that God still loves them and that life is a gift from God and as such we must cherish and preserve it. The Congregation’s mission, in bringing or carrying out or living out the Spirit of the Congregation, is “EVANGELIZATION”. Therefore, our Lord from Matthew 28:18-20 which says “Go Therefore and make Disciples of All Nations Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is Evangelization, and this is the spirit of the congregation. Following the above invitation by Christ to evangelize the whole world coupled with further inspiration that the gospel message must be preached to the local people within the reality of their environment, culture and language, Most Rev. Michael Olutunji Fagun (now emeritus Bishop of Ekiti Diocese) started a Religious Congregation by name Sisters of St Michael the Archangel in the late 1980s to contribute their own quota in the area of evangelization. The programme was an encouraging success in spite of the challenges encountered. The Sisters, the Michaelian family and ensured they lacked nothing to stay happy in the area; depicting the slogan of the group, which is ‘Familial Family; We Are Generous’. It was indeed awesome.

For what purpose is it done?: The program is done for the purpose of evangelization, in bringing or carrying out or living out the Spirit of the Congregation; which is “EVANGELIZATION”. The notion for this is in thanksgiving to God for what He has been to us, and to re-evangelize other Christians who are not of our fold. It is not necessary to convert them to our fold, but bringing the message of Christ to them that God still loves them and that life is a gift from God and as such we must cherish and preserve it.

During this year’s encounter in our outreach and home visitation, the outreach took place in Gwarinpa. The Sisters and their lay associates went to different places within the estate. Areas visited were: 5th Avenue, A close, Chambian Plaza and environs, Road 69, 3rd Avenue, Corner Shop, Lugu, Kuchibena, among others. In their encounter, some of the Sisters and their lay associates were not welcomed while some people received them in an unpleasant manner. Though, the positive aspects of the visitation were more, as they ministered to the needs of the people; question were also asked, and answered, and some tried to offer them gifts. In charity, it was offered back to them. About one hundred and twenty houses were visited during the outreach.

The Michaelian family members were very happy coming to Abuja to be part of this year Gboluwaga; and taking analysis of this year programme, it was a success.

Negative responses: some of the people most especially the Muslim traders did not receive those who went on evangelization to evangelize to them. They did not even accept the tracks that was offered back to them claiming that they will not have time to read it.

Positive responses:

Some areas were receptive and accommodating. They received the Sisters and the Michaelian family with love and they listened and even made their own contributions to the theme preached to them from their own different perspective.

In all, the programme was an encouraging success in spite of the challenges encountered. The Sisters, the Michaelian family

Reverend Sister Regina Oke
Mother General
ABEOKUTA DIOCESE HOSTS 2ND CBCN

We have evolved strategies to Overcome Our Challenges

– Bishop Peter OdetoYinbo

2019 PLENARY
In the 19th Century, Abeokuta, indeed Egbaland was the cradle of the Christian faith following the home coming of late Bishop Ajayi Crowther, a freed slave who returned to his fatherland with the Methodist Religion in 1843.

The late Methodist Bishop was acknowledged noted for his translation and printing of the Bible in Yoruba; having established the first printing press in Yorubaland. With time, other Christian denominations arrived with the Catholic Church arriving Egbaland in 1880, through Lagos colony. The arrival of the Catholic religion in Egbaland, the Church through Rev. Fr. Jean Coquard opened the first hospital in Nigeria, in Abeokuta in the year…. It was therefore not surprising that the late Oba …….., honoured him with the traditional title of Basegun of Egbaland. Since the advent of the Catholic faith in the area, the Church gradually became an invaluable religion to the people of the area because of her investment and involvement in the provision of qualitative education, health delivery services and social amenities as facilitators of her evangelization apostolate in the area. During these early years of the Catholic Church in Egbaland, she was administered from the Archdiocese of Lagos.

However, on the 21st of November 1997 the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II created the Diocese of Abeokuta out of the Archdiocese of Lagos, with Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins appointed as its first Bishop. The diocese consists of the entire Egba and Yewa (Egbado) divisions of the present Ogun State. As the first Local Ordinary of a Church created in a predominantly Moslem area, Bishop Martins along with the priests, religious and faithful embarked on laying a solid foundation for the young diocese, consolidating on the initial efforts of the Lagos Archdiocese. After 15 years as the Local Ordinary of Abeokuta Diocese, duty called Bishop Adewale Martins to a higher responsibility, and was appointed to succeed the ever ebullient Anthony Cardinal Okogie as the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos Ecclesiastical Province, with Abeokuta and Ijebu-Ode as Suffragan dioceses. This movement to Lagos was as a result of the retirement of Cardinal Okogie as the Local Ordinary of Lagos on reaching the Church's stipulated canonical age for retirement.

Thus, the mantle of leadership of the people of God in this territory of the Egba and Egbado people fell on the shoulders of Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo, the erstwhile Vicar General of Ibadan Archdiocese.

Today, after twenty years of existence as a diocese, five of which have been under the watchful eyes of the young and versatile and invaluable Bishop Odetoyinbo, the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta has a lot to show that the Lord has smiled on her and the mission of Christ is not only properly entrenched but has taking the lead position among the Christian denominations in the area. Within five years, the diocese has witnessed tremendous and revolutionary but silent development in all ramifications; as attested to by most of the faithful interviewed when CSN News magazine team visited Abeokuta Diocese on a fact finding mission. While the faithful are appreciating their Local Ordinary as a God–sent missionary in the land of his forefathers; the Bishop attributed the unquantifiable successes achieved within the last five years in the diocese as the manifestation of the hand of God in the life of Christ's Church in Egba/Ebadolands, and the indefatigable commitment and determination of the faithful to serve Christ with all they have and are.

Bishop Odetoyinbo described his primary focus on On-going formation for the holistic development of the diocese and the priests, religious and laity as the key to the notable rapid growth and development of the diocese in his five years as the Local Ordinary. Another reason identified by the Bishop was the ability of the entire faithful under his guidance to evolve strategies that have helped them to overcome the identified challenges of the diocese.

Indeed, the hand of God manifests on daily basis, spiritually and pastorally in the life of Abeokuta Diocese and as pointed out by Bishop Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo in the course of the interview with our crew; and equally confirmed by other key officers of the diocese interviewed.

Read more on the success story of this diocese situated on the cherished and historical Olumo Rock of Egbaland in our interview titled: ON-GOING FORMATION FOR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT KEY TO OUR SUCCESS STORY

Interviews and stories by:
Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu
Otunba Jide Fadugba-Pinheiro
Stephen Oforum
Cajetan Ochi
Chigozie Okafor
Mobilize to receive Catholic Bishops in Abeokuta

All Hands On Deck For Successful Hosting – LOC Chairman
Grace of God at work – Vicar General
Cathedral ready for opening Mass – Administrator

Priests, Religious, Laity

In spite of the enormity of the project of hosting all the Catholic Bishops of the country, the chairman of the planning committee, Rev. Fr. Stephen Sobiye has assured of a successful Plenary for the Spiritual Fathers of the Catholic Church of Nigeria, in Abeokuta, capital of Ogun State, from September 11 to 20, this year.

While expressing joy at hearing the news of the diocese hosting the CBCN Second Plenary for the year 2019, Fr. Shobiye noted that it has not been totally easy. He said: “Hosting a conference of this magnitude, a lot of people will be scared of how we are going to go about it, in what direction are we going to go. But with the help of our bishop who actually made everything so easy for us we are prepared. We began early enough, that was one thing that was of great assistance to us. We started this journey long ago, in fact since towards the end of 2017, we had the Local Organizing Committee in place. So that gave us a long time to begin to brainstorm, to plan and to put everything in place as to what we can do to the best of our abilities.” According to him, all the committees put in place by the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) have been maximizing available resources, opportunities and facilities to ensure that the stay of the Bishops in the capital of Ogun State is not only conducive for their discussions, but also homely with the assurance of the enjoyment of the hospitality of the people of Egba/Egbado area of Ogun State. Furthermore, Fr. Shobiye added that the Bishops will not only be received by the Catholics of the society but also by all the people of Egbaland, including the traditional rulers of the area, to be led by the Alake of Egbaland, the Paramount Ruler of the area and a devout Catholic who coordinates all Catholic traditional rulers in Yorubaland. “Everybody is Abeokuta and environs are anxiously waiting to receive the spiritual

The hotel complex where the Bishops will stay throughout the duration of the Conference at the time of our visit, it was near completion.
blessings of the Bishops, which is one of the expected gains of their visit; the first in the history of the Church in the area. Briefing the CSN Magazine team on the state of readiness for the hosting of the Plenary, Fr. Shobiye disclosed that the New Pastoral Centre that will be the venue of the meeting; comprising a Chapel, hall and enough accommodation for all the Bishops will be in state of readiness by the time of the meeting; while other arrangements like liturgy, feeding, transportation and other facilities, including security have been adequately taken care of by the various sub-committees.

Also speaking to the CSN News Magazine crew, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Oriyomi, the Vicar General of the Diocese stated that:

“The Grace of God at Work”

In her just two decades of existence as a diocese, Abeokuta Diocese has enjoyed the grace of God with our strategy of promoting basic Christian communities, which has achieved tremendous successes, especially in the last five years; the Vicar General of Abeokuta Diocese, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Oriyomi has asserted.

This Vicar General of the diocese gave this verdict during an interview, with the reportorial crew of CSN News Magazine, when they visited Abeokuta recently. Asked to assess the progress of the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the diocese, Fr. Oriyomi replied: “Our strategy is to promote the basic Christian communities or what we call the small Christian communities. There is a pastoral strategy for us, to make the Church at home in every family and vicinity. Our bishop has written a lot and preached a lot about the family structure and how the family in consonance with the faith of the Church and the teachings of the Church like the family is the basic church, the church at home that is where we start from.”

He continued: “So, the basic pastoral strategy in terms of evangelization in the diocese of Abeokuta is to focus on the family in basic Christian communities and parishes. Outstations that should be parishes are really worked upon, we work with the people; for us, it is a basic way.

Secondly, we have regular seminars, in phases. We just finished one a couple of weeks ago; we bring in competent hands to dialogue with us with regards on new areas and new approaches and methods of evangelization. We have had about three seminars so far now in a space of about two years and they are well documented. The bishop also demands that there must be ongoing dialogue and then we come to resolutions, we try to do away with obsolete methods but trying to stay focused. So evangelization is key in the diocese, of course, evangelization is the main reason the Church exists.”

In his assessment of the progress of the diocese under Bishop Odetoyn as the Local Ordinary in the last five years, the Vicar General declared: “One just observes the grace of God at work. In a tremendous way, the bishop is working together with the faithful of the diocese. He has been able to complete the Cathedral project, which integrates the diocese. He has a new system of catechesis and new policies on evangelization. There are always regular seminars for priests and religious. He has a pastoral approach of a Father. He is accessible any day any time and he has the approach that makes people to relax, he helps people to believe that they can accomplish anything; he gives a common focus and encourages everyone to follow on board. He has courageously taken on board the pastoral Centre project which is phenomenal.”

Rev. Fr. Stephen Adeola Balogun the Cathedral Administrator of the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta and one of the key players in the hosting of the Second Plenary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), by Abeokuta Diocese, also spoke to CSN News on the preparedness of the Church for the meeting as well as the situation of the Church in the diocese. He described the shepherds’hip of Most Rev, Peter Kayode Odetoynbo as very awesome stressing that: God has been wonderful and merciful while the bishop has been wonderful.

In his assessment of the growth of the diocese Fr. Balogun declared: “We thank God. As you know the diocese started about twenty/twenty one years ago and
Bishop Odetoyinbo came in as the second bishop of the diocese. I must confess to you, it’s been awesome; he has really done excellently in all ramifications. The diocese has grown structurally with the Cathedral built and completed and dedicated and even the Pastoral Centre that is to host the Bishops’ Conference is in the final stage of completion. There are so many churches within the diocese that are undergoing construction”. He continued: “looking at the spiritual aspect, it’s been awesome; masses celebrated as at when due, other sacraments administered to the faithful as they should; and the people from different walks of life have been testifying. It’s been a wonderful relationship between the priests, the religious, and the lay faithful with all of them collaborating with the bishop to enhance the work of God in the area. In all I will say, God has been faithful and the bishop has been wonderful.”

Fr. Balogun whose Cathedral will be hosting the opening and closing Masses of the Plenary, expressed joy at the hosting of the plenary by the diocese adding that the cathedral and its faithful are ready for the roles assigned them to make the hosting historically successful. He noted that the hosting will bring immense blessing to the diocese and Egbaland in general.

“COMING OF THE BISHOPS A MOTIVATION”

The coming of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria to the Catholic diocese of Abeokuta for their Second Plenary Meeting for 2019 will not only bring invaluable blessings, but has particularly enhanced the communications apostolate in the diocese. As a result of the planning, we have been able to raise the standard of our office in terms of equipment and service delivery. The above was the position of the Director of Social Communications for Abeokuta Diocese, Rev. Fr. Gregory Fadele, while answering questions from the reportorial crew of CSN News Magazine, during an interview session. Fr. Fadele stated: “Even as a communication outfit, it also helped us to beef up for instance what we offer, because we need to buy materials and the light to make sure that we ourselves as a communication outfit we can stand on our own to cover events, not only that, of course the bishops will like to visit our parishes. It will also bring Abeokuta to lime light as the whole world will focus on Abeokuta as a result of the Conference. I used the whole world because once you are on social media, nothing is hidden anymore. So the whole world is focused on Abeokuta to see what is happening live, everyone will tune in as from the 11th of September to see what is happening live in Abeokuta and I think this will really put Abeokuta on the map as we used to say. “The director disclosed that the communication office has acquired modern communications equipment and social media facilities and improved the sound systems equipment in most parishes, adding that this might not have happened if not for the coming of the bishops.

The communication director outlined other spiritual and pastoral benefits the visit of the bishops, to include an opportunity for many faithful of other dioceses resident in Abeokuta and its environs to see their home bishops; helping the diocese to grow in terms of infrastructure and physical development as well as facilitate the conversion of new converts to the Catholic faith. “Really their coming will put Abeokuta on the map as we used to say”; he added.

Just like every other diocese, there is always a challenge. The major challenge concerns the means of evangelization. There is always the challenge of the persons who will go; what needs to be done and how it ought to be done. We have tried to evolve a lot of strategies to overcome our challenges. First, we have our own syllabus for catechesis to meet up with the challenges of our peculiar area. Secondly, the priests in the parishes have catechetical Sundays that enable them to teach catechism to the people.
SPECIAL FOCUS ON ABEOKUTA

BISHOP PETER KAYODE ODETOYINBO:

The diocese of Abeokuta, a Sufrigan of Lagos Ecclesiastical Province, and one of the two Catholic Dioceses in Ogun State has something good going for them at the moment.

It is a young diocese, created by Pope Saint John Paul II 21 years ago; and being managed by a very young, dynamic, ebullient and resourceful Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Dr. Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo, who became Bishop five years ago. Born on the 28th of January 1964 in Ibadan, the sixth child in a family of seven, (three boys and four girls), Bishop Peter Odetoyinbo is an erudite scholar, teacher and silent achiever, whose primary goal is achieving what is required without counting the costs in the service of God and humanity. Going down memory lane of his early life, the young Bishop declared: “I had a good religious upbringing from my late parents, Pa and Mama Clement and Comfort Odetoyinbo. I attended St. Michael’s Primary School, Yemetu, Ibadan, Oyo State; as well as, the St. Theresa Minor Seminary in Oke Are also in Ibadan; and of course SS. Peter and Paul Major Seminary Bodija, Ibadan. I was ordained for the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan and served in the Archdiocese in many capacities; first as Parish Priest and then as Vicar General. Later I became a lecturer in SS Peter and Paul Major Seminary and the Dominican Institute, both in Ibadan. I was privileged to offer my service to the church, as Vicar General for eight years under Most Rev Felix Alaba Job, the Emeritus Archbishop of Ibadan Archdiocese. I was made a Monsignor by Pope Francis in 2013, before I was appointed on April 15, 2014 as the Bishop of Abeokuta diocese; and for five years now, I have been the bishop on this seat of Abeokuta Diocese.”

Young Bishop Peter Odetoyinbo, who was once the Bishop Chairman of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria Youth Committee; is one shepherd whose motivating spirit is: “with God nothing is impossible.” Perhaps, it is this motivating spirit that has helped him in piloting Abeokuta Diocese to achieve tremendous successes in both spiritual and Pastoral life of the Church within a short period of five years. Bishop Odetoyinbo is one Pastor whose exemplary life has influenced the faithful of the diocese and spurred them to embrace the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the diocese with avid determination; hence the success story of the diocese today is according to the Bishop “the collective achievement of the priests, religious and lay faithful led by his humble self.

As the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria gather in Abeokuta for their 2019 Second Plenary, they will definitely see a young diocese with giant strides in achievements and a resolute and determined faithful, guided by a humble young Bishop whose primary focus is the on-going holistic formation of the diocese and the entire faithful in the evangelization apostolate of Christ, in all ramifications. For the faithful of the diocese, Bishop Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo is a God-sent prelate, and their love for him in appreciation of his sterling leadership qualities is unquenchable; as attested to by most of them.

A Young Dynamic Administrator, Beloved Of His Faithful
INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP PETER KAYODE ODETOYINBO

On-Going Formation For Holistic Development; Key To Our Success Story

WE HAVE EVOLVED STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME OUR CHALLENGES

(Edited text of the interview with Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo, the Catholic Bishop of Abeokuta Diocese)

Question: For the purpose of this interview, can you please give us a little bit of your background.

Answer: My name is Peter Odetoyinbo. I am the Catholic Bishop of Abeokuta Diocese. I was born on the 28th of January 1964 in Ibadan, in a family of seven (7), three (3) boys, four (4) girls. I am number six (6) in the family. All my siblings are doing fine; all are married except me because of the vocation I have chosen in life.

I had a good religious upbringing from my late parents, Pa and Mama Clement and Comfort Odetoyinbo. I attended St. Michael’s Primary School, Yemetu, Ibadan; as well as, the St. Theresa Minor Seminary in Oke Are also in Ibadan; and of course SS. Peter and Paul Major Seminary Bodija, Ibadan. I was ordained for the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan and served in the Archdiocese in many capacities; first as Parish Priest and then as Vicar General. Later I became a lecturer in SS Peter and Paul Major Seminary and the Dominican Institute, both in Ibadan. I was privileged to offer my service to the church, as Vicar General for eight years under Most Rev Felix Alaba Job, the Emeritus Archbishop of Ibadan Archdiocese. I was made a Monsignor by Pope Francis in 2013, before I was appointed on April 15, 2014 as the Bishop of Abeokuta Diocese; and for five years now, I have been the bishop on this seat of Abeokuta Diocese.

Question: You have been a Bishop for five years now, how has the journey been so far?

Answer: I will say so far so good! I can’t complain, it’s what I have taken up. Well, the background I had as a Vicar General in Ibadan under the mentorship of Archbishop Alaba Job prepared me for whatever work I am doing at the moment. I thank God for the background knowledge, experience and tutelage with regard to how to work with the clergy, religious and laity, as well as the administration, spiritual growth, ongoing formation, promotion of vocation in priesthood and total development of the entire diocese. I will say, what I am doing now for the past five years, is not different from what I have done in the past. The only difference now is that one is now the Chief Shepherd.

Question: What has been your major focus since you assumed office?

Answer: My focus has been on the on-going formation of the clergy, the religious and laity. We have had a lot of programs geared towards this purpose every year. We have just finished one for this year on new evangelization. I will say we are all braced up, for the physical development, spiritual growth, and moral enrichment of the diocese, with emphasis on bringing the priests and the people together.

The first thing I did after my consecration was to have a meeting with the priests, the religious and the laity. I met also with the various organs of the laity: Catholic Men Organization (CMO), Catholic Women Organization...
SPECIAL FOCUS ON ABEOKUTA

Bishop Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo
CWO, Youth and the Holy Childhood Association (HCA) to engage on evangelization and spiritual growth, not just to look for money. I must appreciate the efforts of the Legionaries and the Charismatic Renewal Movement because they are really good tools in spreading the gospel. We also have formed the basic Christian communities which we use as a tool for renewal of family life. The family life is a challenge today. Everything boils down to the family. We are trying as much as possible to strengthen the family life. For instance, we have weekend programmes for married couples. We call it marriage encounter. About 25 couples have participated in the marriage encounter programme since we started.

Question: You are planning to host the Bishops of the country in September, how ready and prepared are

When I was a lecturer in the seminary, I used to drum it in the ears of my students on the need to be fulfilled as priests and love what one does. One has to arrive at that point, where one has to be happy with oneself, in the priesthood, of Jesus Christ. I will be 30 years as a priest on October 7, I want to continue to do more as long as God gives me life, spend my life and share experiences, help other younger priests, lay faithful, accompany them in this journey of faith and the journey of the priesthood and family life. In a nutshell, that’s all I want to do, to make the Church present in Abeokuta in all its ramifications and whatever the Church can offer, in mission, in education, in health, in priesthood, for vocations and in everybody. It is an all-embracing missionary life and apostolate and pastoral care in the diocese of Abeokuta that I have committed myself.
you?
Answer: We are prepared according to our means. It is a joy to have the bishops come here to have their plenary meeting. We have anticipated hosting the Bishops’ Conference since 2016 when we knew it was going to be the turn of Lagos Province to host in 2019. We have mobilized the priests, religious and the laity to key into the project since 2016. As you can see we are building a Pastoral Centre which we hope to complete before the plenary meeting. We are confident we will be able to host the bishops comfortably. It may not be excellent but I know that the bishops will always manage whatever is provided for them because we understand that not all dioceses are equal. I will say we are ready to host.

Question: What has been the relationship between the Catholic Church in the diocese with the state government, other Christian denominations and other religious groups?
Answer: We have always extended a hand of fellowship to the state government. When I was consecrated a bishop, the Governor then was Ibikunle Amosu. I paid him a courtesy call and we invited him severally but he never visited or attended any of our ceremonies. I remember we had some scuttle with him about hijab and all those things which we protested and wrote letters but he never came to the fore. We approached him with regard to the return of mission schools to their original owners; he promised to release the schools to Christians when he finished building his model schools, but that never materialized until his tenure finished. At the moment we are still engaging his successor. With the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), I will say there is a good relationship with CAN in Ogun State. You know there are two Catholic dioceses in Ogun State: Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta. We are regarded as one block, and recently we visited the state Police Commissioner who is a Catholic and the DSS. We have always done things together with CAN. Prior to the elections, with CAN, I participated in the interviews for all the candidates for governorship election. It was done in my compound. I will say there has been a good relationship between CAN and the Catholic Church in Ogun State.

With regard to relationship between the Catholic Church and other religions, I have a priest who is in charge of inter-religious dialogue. We have had seminars but we have not had opportunity to meet but I know there are occasions when we attend functions with people of other faiths. For instance, during Christmas carols and other functions organized by the state.

Question: How would you assess the relationship between the priests and the lay faithful in the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta?
Answer: My first assignment when I took over the mantle of leadership of Abeokuta Diocese was to meet with the priests of the diocese. We had a retreat in Ibadan, at the SMA House, which helped to solidify the communion among the priests. I also met with the laity separately. I must tell you that now the coast is clear. The priests and the laity are working together in the diocese. There is a cordial relationship between the priests and the laity in the diocese. I am proud of the vibrant laity and committed priests we have in Abeokuta. To the greater glory of God, we will continue to build up better communion between the Bishop, the priests and the laity; as a family of God in moving Abeokuta diocese forward.

Question: You are the Chairman of CBCN Education Committee; what would you say were the fruits of the last third national education summit held in Abuja, and how is the Church implementing the resolutions adopted?
Answer: I don’t have a general view of what is happening
I am a product of good family upbringing but how many children today can stand up and say the same thing. The respect for family values and human life is lost. Today our emphasis is on money. That is why Yahoo boys, kidnappers, assassins are on the increase. I believe that a return to God is the only solution. We have left God and we are taking hold of our lives, we have embraced money. Religious people, politicians, all of us have embraced money and so money has become the determinant factor. Jesus has warned that money as it is will walk away but we walk towards it. As religious people, we can't lose hope as we say Nigeria belongs to God. We must keep our hope alive that God will save his people and save Nigeria. We don’t know when this is going to end but we know that as long as God is alive, He will do something about Nigeria.

in the other dioceses but I know that the education summit was a success, the participation, the lectures and the CDs prepared by the CSN Communications Directorate. At the moment we are working on a document on child abuse. We have a draft already. Very soon after our corrections, it will be presented to the CBCN for approval. At the long run, it will become a policy on child abuse and protection for Catholic schools in Nigeria.

Question: You were at one time in charge of the youth in the Church; how would you look at the youth apostolate in terms of the last Synod of Bishops and the Holy Father’s exhortation – Christus Vivit; how is the Church in Nigeria willing to implement the proceedings?
Answer: Unfortunately, I’m now in education, that question is meant for Bishop John Oyejola who is in charge of the youth. However, I am so glad that the synod held. I thank the Holy Father for giving that opportunity for the youths to express themselves. It is an achievement and I know that all those who participated were satisfied, that at least, the Church listens to the youths. Coming home, I think the same thing should be done and the same thing is being done. I don’t see any bishop who does not listen to the youths. The youths are cared for and supported in the Church. In Abeokuta, the youths have priority in my administration and apostolate, they know it and they can testify to it. The Youths are given the opportunity to express themselves and they have been very active. They are even planning for a programme this August and they are getting ready for the CBCN 2nd plenary to serve the bishops.

Question: Can we look at the 50 years of SECAM, the celebration just ended in Uganda? What is your own comment about the Church in Africa?
Answer: I have been hearing of SECAM but unfortunately I have not had the opportunity to participate. This one too, I did not go. I just came back from the Education Summit in New York. I didn’t have direct information on the conclusion of their convention but by and large, I appreciate what SECAM has done in the past 50 years. It is a good thing that Africa has such a powerful force to disseminate, to congregate and to evangelize.

Question: Where will you want the diocese of Abeokuta to be in the next 5 years?
Answer: I know the diocese will grow in all ramifications. Since I became a bishop, there is an increase in vocation, the priests have increased. On Saturday, I’m ordaining 6 deacons as priests. After that we will open up other parishes in the diocese. I have almost 10 parishes waiting to be created but there are no priests. I can see that there are prospects in Abeokuta for evangelization as well as prospects of development. structurally, pastorally and spiritually the diocese will continue to grow. We must build new schools. We have 9 deaneries but there are no Catholic schools in all the deaneries. Hospitals and clinics are also avenue for evangelization. But more importantly is the spiritual growth. My vision and prospects is that we should be able to grow to love and serve God in the Abeokuta in the next five years.

Question: What is your advice for the people of Abeokuta Diocese?
Answer: My advice to priests of Abeokuta is for them to remain committed to their duties as priests. They are ordained to serve the people of God. The Church has wept because of various abuses but the more we commit ourselves not to make our mother weep but to make her smile.

For the religious, it is important to state that a diocese without the religious is not complete, we are complete in Abeokuta with the religious. We can’t but have the religious in Abeokuta because they have a special place in the church. The laity is our backbone. If they go on strike, we are hungry. We will continue to make sure that they are netted together and are very much understood. In the life of the Church, the laity are included in our administration. They should continue to hold on to their faith despite the challenges of life in the society.

Question: Let us look at the Nigerian nation, with all the political, religious and social economic challenges; how can we come out of the present predicament the country is facing?
Answer: I agree that the challenge we are facing at the moment as a country is enormous. In the past even with our problems there was sincerity of purpose, there was truthfulness, there was care, there was sensitivity. But now, we have lost everything. Politicians are not
sensitive, they are taking Nigerians for granted. There is the attitude of who can do anything to me? And that is how we have been treated. Look at all the decaying infrastructures, who is answerable to anyone? No one! Workers are been owed salaries for 6-7 months. The greatest challenge is the pressure on the family. Our families are breaking up; which is the bedrock of nation building. I am a product of good family up bringing but how many children today can stand up and say the same thing. The respect for family values and human life is lost. Today our emphasis is on money. That is why Yahoo boys, kidnappers, assassins are on the increase. I believe that a return to God is the only solution. We have left God and we are taking hold of our lives, we have embraced money. Religious people, politicians, all of us have embraced money and so money has become the determinant factor. Jesus has warned that money as it is will walk away but we walk towards it. As religious people, we can’t lose hope as we say Nigeria belongs to God. We must keep our hope alive that God will save his people and save Nigeria. We don’t know when this is going to end but we know that as long as God is alive, He will do something about Nigeria.

Question: We want you to look specifically on the issue of insecurity and the need for dialogue for peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Answer: The problem of Nigeria is one person; the problem in the family is one person, if that person refuses to do what he/ is supposed to do; if a father refuses to do what is expected of him, if a mother refuses to do what she is supposed to do; one person, then there is problem. In the diocese, if the bishop refuses to do what he is supposed to do, in the parish, if a priest refuses to do what he is supposed to do, if the

Group photograph of members of the Local Organising Committee. (5th from left) is Bishop Peter Kayode Odetoynbo.
SPECIAL FOCUS ON ABEOKUTA

WE ASSURE OUR SPIRITUAL FATHERS, THE BEST OF OUR MOTHERLY CARE – CWO President

The President of the Catholic Women Organization (CWO), of Abeokuta Diocese, Mrs. Grace Omani has described the organization as the invaluable partner of the Church in her evangelization mission and assured that the members of the organization have put everything in place to ensure that the coming of the Catholic Bishops of the country to the diocese is not only memorable but historic in terms of care and reception.

Speaking to the CSN News magazine during an interview the CWO President declared: As women and mothers of the diocese we are not leaving any stone unturned in preparation for the hosting the bishops of the country. It is our desire to make the care and reception they receive linger for a very long time. We will be on ground by the special grace of God to make sure that our spiritual fathers are comfortable throughout their stay here by the special grace of God. We are also in various committees that have been setup towards the hosting.

Mrs. Omani was very optimistic that the visit of the Bishops will beneficial to the diocese and the state in spiritual, pastoral and other ways that will benefit the people of the state in general. According to her: “The benefits of the coming of the bishops is enormous. One is their prayers and blessings that they will bring to this land and the people of the diocese. Also, you know that some of our members biologically are not from here; they will have the opportunity of meeting their home bishops during this period. There is also the benefit of the visit helping to win new converts for the Church as well as bring back some strayed Catholics. The visit will also enhance some developments for the area and provide business opportunities for many. In fact the benefits are numerous.”

Mrs. Omani also commented on the development of the diocese in the five years of the shepherdship of Bishop Peter Odetoyinbo. She said: “The coming of Bishop Peter Kanyode Adetonyibo is a blessing to this diocese. Since he came, there have been positive changes in the diocese. The parishes have increased to about 50, just as we have more deaneries. The new Pastoral Centre where we will host the Bishops is an edifice of no mean dimension and nearing completion. He established the Widows Apostolate which gives us joy as women. These widows need consolation and that apostolate has made some of them realize that somebody somewhere cares for them and they always look forward to meeting with the bishop on the days stipulated for meeting with him. And our bishop too, each time we have functions and we invite him, he supports us, even our assemblies. He accommodates us. He is always there for us facilitating the success of our spiritual and pastoral activities and he supports us even financially.”

Mrs. Omani who spoke on how the association has been mobilizing the women of the diocese for effective participation in the spiritual and pastoral activities of the Church in the diocese and effectively collaborating with other organizations of the Church to enhance the mission of the Church in the area disclosed that several programmes like seminars, workshops and trainings have been regularly put in place for the mobilization of the women of the diocese. She said: “The women are trying. Christ is the life wire of the Church. The women are an arm of the Church tripod of CMO, CYON and CWO but a very strong one and the Catholic Women Organization is the umbrella organization for all women, all female baptized Catholics in the diocese. She added: “Women are developers and evangelizers, so we mobilize our women in the deaneries and in the parishes. We hold assemblies and retreats for our members to enable them perform and do what they are supposed to do as mothers in the parishes and the diocese in general.”

The CWO President also spoke on the role of women in the family and the crucial issues of child abuse attributing this to ignorance and poverty. She said: “The rate of poverty in the country is high and it pains me when I see under age children hawking on the streets. Some even trade to feed the family and some parents go as far as giving these under age children out to people for money, it is alarming. But during our seminars, we tell our women the implications of it and the harm they are doing to these children. She also commented on the challenges of women trafficking drug abuse, kidnapping and robbery as they affect the families and the efforts of the CWO, through the national body to combat these challenges.

Noting that these challenges can be addressed with prayers the CWO President remarked that the collaborative effort of fathers and mothers has a major role to play in controlling these challenges as they affect families. Her words: “So
Mobilizing the youths of the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta for a more integral participation in the evangelization mission of the Church in the context of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, Christus Vivit, is one of the projects on the front burners of the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo, the diocesan President of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYON), Mr. Dominic Omotayo Botoku has disclosed.

The CYON President made this disclosure when asked about the interest and support the youths of the diocese are getting from Bishop Peter Odetoyinbo since he assumed office as the Local Ordinary of the diocese, five years ago.

According to Mr. Botoku: “In terms of relations with the youths, I will say it has been awesome. I will say the youth have been the ones having the privileges as regards to relationships with the bishop. He is a bishop who loves the youth apostolate and I think this was why the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria and CBCN made him Chairman, CBCN Youth Committee, sometime ago.

He brought that love and care for the youths at the national level down to us in Abeokuta diocese and we are really enjoying his fatherly care and interest. He gives us opportunities to meet and discuss our apostolate with him regularly good opportunity to meet more often and gives us fatherly advice as to how to plan and implement our programmes and activities. He is personally involved in our apostolate. It has been wonderful and graceful experience having him as our bishop.”

The CYON President intimated the CSN News magazine team on how the youths have been involved in the activities for the hosting of the Bishops’ Conference by the diocese, without any discrimination from the laity council. He stated: “We have been given responsibilities suitable for our experiences and abilities, and we have no complaints about the roles given to us. He added that the youths are happy to see all the Bishops of the country coming to Abeokuta and expressed optimism that this will bring spiritual blessings, pastoral advancement and social benefits to all the people of Abeokuta Diocese, especially the youths, irrespective of their religious differences.

On how the youths are being mobilized for the mission of the Church in the diocese, Mr. Botoku disclosed that training programmes and spiritual exercises are being organized by CYON for members of all the affiliate groups and the youths are being mobilized in the context of their being citizens of the digital world.

His words: Basically, we try to see how we can fuse-in their usefulness in the context of things that are trending. Talking about the 21st century, youths and children of nowadays love gadgets and multimedia facilities. So, we have been having seminars, training programmes, especially on how to make use of gadgets and the multimedia. In Abeokuta Diocese we have realized that we have young talents who are good in music, we have keyed into music and we have also keyed into fashion and bead making. All these things that we noticed that youth have interests in, we have brought together and we are trying to see how we can have training seminars and workshops on how to make them, so that the youths can be gainfully employed, apart from looking for white collar jobs which are now very difficult to come by.

The CYON President described the youths of the diocese as very vibrant and dynamic in the evangelization mission of the diocese, especially among their peers; and actively involved in all the reach-out apostolate of the Church in collaboration with other societies, association and sodalities of the Church. He added that the youths also enjoy the support of the priests and religious of the diocese who give them guidelines on how to sustain everything that we are doing and see how we can have training seminars and workshops on how to meet more often and gives us fatherly advice as to how to plan and implement our programmes and activities. He is personally involved in our apostolate. It has been wonderful and graceful experience having him as our bishop.”

On where she wants the diocese to be in the next five or ten years, Mrs. Omani replied: “The next 5 – 10 years I believe Abeokuta should be having up to 100 parishes, up to 15 deaneries and maybe it would have become an arch – I do not want to complete it”
Social Services as vehicles of Evangelization In Abeokuta Diocese

The Social Services arms of the Church in Abeokuta Diocese have contributed immensely to the success story of the Catholic Church in Egba/Egbado areas of Ogun State; which constitute the Catholic diocese of Abeokuta. Without doubt, the activities of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS); health and education department and the justice and peace department of the church have impacted positively on the lives of the people of the diocese; through their activities; and the invaluable services they render does discriminate. Infact, the humanitarian activities of the church in the diocese transcends parochial, ethnic and religious differences; non Catholics are known to have benefitted more from the activities of the health and education departments of the diocese; as well as the unique activities of the Pontifical Mission Societies office of the diocese, which have no ethnic or religious boundaries.

The health delivery services of the Church in Abeokuta Diocese is as old as the faith in the land. The Sacred Heart Hospital Lantoro, Abeokuta is a hospital with comprehensive health delivery care services in different aspects of the sector and rendering invaluable services to the people of Abeokuta and environs. The hospital is not only well equipped but has competent professionals manning the different departments of the hospital. It is also a nursing school and home for motherless babies. The hospital, in terms of service and delivery is at par with the government hospital in the state; and the church is the second provider of this very important service for humanity in the state; after the government. Apart from the Sacred Heart Hospital, the diocese also has health centres and clinics where adequate health care services are provided for the people.

In the same vein, the office of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) has been a primary agent for the evangelization success, growth and development of the Abeokuta Diocese, the director, Rev. Fr. Michael Adenigba has disclosed. Speaking to the CSN News Magazine team during an interview. Fr. Adenigba stated that the activities of PMS in the diocese became more proactive since Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoynibo became the Local Ordinary of the diocese, five years ago.

According to him, the name Pontifical Mission Societies sends a very deep message. It is the Pontifical agency that coordinates the affairs of the missions and how support gets down to dioceses and parishes from Rome. The director noted that the interest of the faithful in the activities of the PMS became more pronounced when Bishop Odetoynibo invited the National PMS Director for the country, Rev. Fr. George Ajana to come and talk to the faithful on the importance and functions of PMS in the life of the Church.

His words: “The office has done quite a lot. I remember about 4 years ago or thereabout, we invited the national director of PMS, Very Rev. Fr. George Ajana to come around for awareness creation. So he did quite a lot in talking to every one of us, the priests, the religious, catechists and the lay faithful. He was able to raise our consciousness to the necessity of evangelization and the mission in the context of our own involvement, by doing our own bit to ensure that the mission of Christ is fulfilled here on earth at least for the salvation of mankind.”

Below are excerpts from the interview with the Abeokuta Diocese Pontifical Mission Societies Director:

Question: You have been working with Bishop Odetoynibo for some time now, how would you assess his contributions to the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the diocese, since he became the Local Ordinary?

Answer: Let me emphatically say, that we have really enjoyed the support of our bishop, Most Rev. Peter Adetoyinbo. As a matter of fact; he keeps us on our toes. He has done a lot for us. It was through his assistance we brought the PMS National Director to do the awareness creation some time ago. Since after that orientation programme, many parishes have keyed into the whole essence of missionary activities in the diocese. I can testify that before his arrival, we were not doing too well in terms of our commitment to raising funds, especially the Universal Church solidarity collections. We have the Holy Childhood Association (HCA) support fund; we have that of Propagation of the Faith which we take on World Mission Sunday every October. We also have the St. Peter Apostle collection. All these collections especially the World Mission Sunday collection has witnessed a spontaneous growth. Initially we were talking of about 300, 400, 500 hundred thousand before the bishop came in. But now, we are in the region of 4 million naira in the past 3 – 4 years. So the people are really aware that they have to support the mission of Christ.

Fr. Michael Adenigba – JDPC
Question: Do you have any special project for the diocese as a PMS Director especially as you work with children?

Answer: Yes we do. As a matter of fact, the entire diocese is our project because we intend to reach out to every aspect of the diocese, the Church. Talking about children, we usually have this programme, Children's Day with the Bishop every 27th May, annually; and it has witnessed commendable improvement over time. We keep having more and more children who wish to participate in the celebration.

Also, as one of the human development arms of the church; the education department of the diocese has also played a commendable role in the evangelization apostolate of the church in the diocese. According to Rev. Fr. Oke, the role of education as a veritable tool for the evangelization apostolate of the Church cannot be controverted, hence it has been a key facilitator of missionary activities since the advent of the Catholic Missionaries to the country; Abeokuta Diocese is no exception in this perspective.

According to Fr. Oke, education has continually played a major role in the evangelization apostolate of the Church in the diocese. His words: “The education sector has greatly contributed to the mission of evangelization because as we know, education is the tool for development and even for spreading the gospel.

He continued: “Education and schools have been able to bring people basically out of ignorance and getting them to understand the fact that if you have that freedom of spirit that will help you to choose between good and evil and to always be formed by a good conscience to do what is right. The director added: “In Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta, this is a mission territory basically. The Church has even tried to take it to the grassroots to make it available to the people, most especially where there is lack of funds. You see the Church and the Bishop are trying to use the resources of the diocese to make school fees affordable at least by providing the basic needs for the schools of the diocese.

Fr. Oke who outlined the functions of his office to include coordinating all the schools in the diocese, especially in the areas of formation of policies, guiding the teachers in the directorate of education and also the content that forms the curriculum for these schools primary and secondary; disclosed that the diocese has about 11 primary schools; seven nursery and primary schools and four secondary schools located in various axis of the diocese.

The diocesan director of education noted that the local ordinary is a lover of education saying: “As we all know, he was a teacher, he lectured in the seminary, so that has even made my own work easier because it is easy to interface with him on the schools. He continued: “Most times, when we have our bishops or our superiors who understand what education is, it is easy to make very clear cut policies that will move the schools forward. So his own ideas about schools and lecturing have helped me most especially in the areas of administration”. The education director also spoke on the efforts of the church on getting mission schools back and the level of success achieved and the challenges.

Fr. Oke regretted that in spite of the several discussions of the Church with the previous administration of Governor Ibikunle Amosun, the government has not been forthcoming favourably 100 percent in this respect.

He added that: “Now we have a new Governor and discussions are in top gear to remind the governor about what the past government has done to help return all of these schools and what we are doing as a Church.

On his vision for education apostolate in the diocese in the next five or ten years, Fr. Oke reiterated that education is one of the vehicles through which the vision and mission of the Church can be realized. His words: “In the next five or ten years, I see Abeokuta diocese even having schools in almost every deanery and that is our plan by the special grace of God. I am sure if the diocese is able to achieve this feat, it will help us a lot as we will not only focus on academics alone, but provide holistic education in the context of the Catholic Church. The human formations must be complete; and this is the desire of most parents for their children.”

When one talks about the humanitarian services of the Church in Abeokuta, the Justice, Development and Peace Movement is a front liner and has tremendously contributed to the growth of the diocese, through its social services and corporal works of mercy; the coordinator of the movement in the diocese, Rev. Fr. Eric Olatunji told CSN News magazine. According to the JDPM Director, all the activities of the movement have been geared towards service to humanity for the common good of the society; and this has been a crucial part of the evangelization apostolate of the Church.

Fr. Olatunji summarized the services rendered by the movement thus: “The JDPM of the diocese has really
contributed to the growth of the diocese in very many ways. We have intervened in the area of human rights protection; we have also connected with the government which as it were, helped us to release some prison inmates. We work in different apostolates such as prison apostolate, democracy and good governance, as well as working relationship with international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). They have been helping us in many ways in resolving different conflicts within communities in the state. We try to empower the masses, helping them to know their rights, helping them with the necessary knowledge so that they will be able to make their own impact, ask questions from government and tell government what they want.

He continued: “Apart from the human rights activities, we also intervene in the area of micro-credit scheme; we talk about empowering the masses. Again, within the micro-credit scheme, we give loans to small scale business owners to help them; and we also have the Agric department. In the Agric department, we have various farmers groups across the diocese and other parts of the state. These groups, we try as much as possible to empower them, give them the necessary knowledge on how to make good use of farm implements and new technologies.

Fr. Olatunji also spoke on the collaboration with government in the area of Prison decongestion as well as the collaboration with Misereo of Germany on the issue of Good Governance; and reaching out to various civil society groups; Community Development Associations (CDAs) and different parastatals that have to do with government. The JDPM also addressed the people about their rights as citizens, before the last elections in the state. He continued: “We have different groups which we have put in place in different parts of the state to relate with different groups, CDAs, the CDCs in eleven local government areas in the state and through all these different stakeholders, we have been able to conscientise the people and tell them about their rights as citizens. Also we participated in budget monitoring and project monitoring because we discovered that, sometimes, governments do not release the budget on time. So, in these areas, we have really been making good impact in the lives of the people.”

Fr. Olatunji commended Bishop Odetoyinbo for his invaluable and tremendous support for the activities of the Movement noting that; without the help of the bishop, the Movement would not have been able to participate effectively in the last elections, especially in the area of the training of monitors and observers. He said: “He never turned us down; he gave us every support, the financial assistance and everything. Also, in the area of micro finance, he has been supporting because nowadays, you write to international communities and international donors but they are likely not to have much to give, in terms of subsidies. The Bishop has really been very supportive.”

On his future vision for the diocese, Fr. Olatunji declared: “Well in the next five years, I wish that the diocese should have a micro finance bank and that we have started working on. If we have a micro finance bank, we will be able to reach down to the grassroots, not just Catholics, but also non-Catholics. We will be able to remove their burden and empower them which is very important.”

I will say so far so good! I can’t complain, it’s what I have taken up. Well, the background I had as a Vicar General in Ibadan under the mentorship of Archbishop Alaba Job prepared me for whatever work I am doing at the moment. I thank God for the background knowledge, experience and tutelage with regard to how to work with the clergy, religious and laity, as well as the administration, spiritual growth, ongoing formation, promotion of vocation in priesthood and total development of the entire diocese.
A COLLABORATIVE LAITY IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH

The consensus decision often taken at our meetings on vital issues has been responsible for our collaboration with our Father in the Lord, Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoynibo, the Priests and Religious; and this has indeed facilitated the tremendous growth of the diocese on religious and pastoral matters; Mr. Vincent Akintola Akande, President of the Diocesan Laity Council has disclosed.

The Laity Council president, who spoke extensively on the invaluable role of the council as the coordinating body for all the sodalities, lay societies and association in the diocese, went down memory lane on how the lay faithful have remained resolute and committed in their vocation to the work of Christ in the diocese, because “they are the church in the world in the context of Abeokuta Diocese.”

Mr. Vincent Akintola Akande
President, Laity Council, Abeokuta Diocese

On how the Catholic Church in the diocese has gradually become the number one Christian Church in the land which is also said to have more Moslems than Christians; Mr. Akande remarked: “We thank God for everything, bringing people to know God through Catholicism in Abeokuta is what our Forefathers have placed on a good terrain. The establishments of Saint Luke’s Teachers’ Training College, where we have helped to train many as teachers and the Sacred Heart Hospital, which has been in existence since the advent of the faith in the land and has been providing adequate and effective medical care for the people, have helped the apostolate of the Church in the diocese. The provision of these essential services really motivated the people to embrace Catholicism.”

He continued: “Also the personal presentation of our people amongst the community in terms of love and care, good neighbourliness, admonishment, encouragement, communal relationship, exemplary simple and humble way of living, and peaceful sharing of the Word of God have also helped us in our evangelization apostolate to win converts for the Church. It is only not when you go on open air crusade that you convert people but also your personal interaction with them. When people see you to be humble and godly person, they emulate you and they want to join your congregation.”

In his assessment of the five years leadership of Bishop Odetoynibo as the Local Ordinary of the diocese, Mr. Akande described the Bishop as an exemplary leader, a rugged motivator who propels the faithful to action in all ramifications. He declared: “Forever in Abeokuta diocese, we will be grateful to God and to the Vatican for the creation of our diocese and the Episcopal ordination of our present Bishop, Most Rev. Peter Odtoyinbo His presence in Abeokuta Diocese has brought a lot of successes and tremendous achievements.”

He remarked: “Since he came on board, many things have been done, spiritually physically and socially. Let me start with the completion of the Cathedral Church building. When he came on board, it was at the roofing stage, but within a year of his assumption of office, the edifice was completed and it was a master piece. Talk about our environment here, this Pilgrimage Centre and the Bishop’s House, he has done a perfect job in the area of landscaping and beautification and he is sustaining it. The environment is neat, perfect and serene that one will like to visit for recollection or retreat. Talk about our ventures, the CDA stations are being managed properly. The Sacred Heart Hospital is functioning effectively and doing a good job in terms of giving medical care to the people of Abeokuta and Ogun State at large.

The laity president added: “Spiritually, many new Reverend Fathers have been ordained, along with other spiritual programmes to enhance the spirituality of the faithful. All these within his five years in office. Now, we are preparing to host all the bishops of the country. This is an honour and a source of blessing to us in Ogun State; to the Catholic faithful and all the people, irrespective of their religious differences, as well as the Government of Ogun State. This
SPECIAL FOCUS ON ABEOKUTA

is because when we have the convergence of the people of God in Abeokuta, to me, it is another gathering of Antioch in Abeokuta, 2019. We are expecting various blessings personally and in groups.”

He also spoke on how the faithful have been responding to the call of the bishops for Catholic lay faithful to be actively involved in politics to sanitize the arena and impact on it Christian morals and Catholic values. He disclosed that all efforts are being geared towards this directive, through the effective Catholic Social Forum, to sanitize and encourage Catholics to go into politics and be upright and exemplary. His words: “Let me say this, our terminology in the laity is; Light of the world and salt of the earth, one church, one laity. If we are really the salt of the earth, then we need to show people that we are salt of the earth by leading and championing the restructuring that we want in Nigeria, living by example, leading people to know what is good, what is right and not what is bad. But it will be a gradual thing. On the part of the laity, we are doing this through Catholic social forum which is our umbrella body for Catholics in politics but at God’s appointed time, I know we are going to have many Catholics coming on board to lead Nigeria in sensitive places of authority. So we are counting on God to do that for us.”

On how the lay faithful are been mobilized by the council for effective discharge of their apostolic duties, the Laity President replied: “We hold our meetings frequently where we deliberate on salient issues and we come up with consensus to move the diocese forward. Apart from that, we have schedule seminars and workshops to enlighten our people on how to relate either with the clergy or with the immediate environment, our neighbors. We equally do harvest, to generate revenue to sponsor most of our activities.”

Speaking of his desire for Abeokuta Diocese in the next five or ten years, Mr. Akande stated: “If in less than five years that our Bishop came on board, the Pastoral Centre has been built, it is likely that he will consider the establishment of a monastery, and when we have that, people will want to come around. On the part of the laity, we are thinking of having a farm settlement for agriculture and food chain oriented programme where our youths can work, where they will produce enough foods for Abeokuta and the people of Ogun state in general. So, in another ten years, the Catholic Diocese of Abeokuta will be a heaven on earth.

Corroborating the remarks of the Laity President on the role of the Laity in the diocese, the President of the Catholic Men Organization (CMO) of Abeokuta Diocese, Mr. Gabriel Adamolekun predicted a more vibrant Catholic Church in the service of humanity for the common good of all Abeokuta Diocese in the next five or ten years. Mr. Adamolekun’s prediction is predicated on the rapid development of the diocese in both spiritual, pastoral and social services activities of the diocese under the shepherds of Most Rev. Peter Odetoyinbo; who took over the leadership of the twenty one years old diocese, five years ago; and the commitment and dedication of the faithful in this perspective.

According to him, the way the Local Ordinary has been motivating and mobilizing the priests, religious and lay faithful in the evangelization apostolate, missionary activities, pastoral duties and commitment to service of humanity, irrespective of differences; clearly gears the faithful towards reaching-out with the Good News of Christ with love, compassion and dedication as was the case with the early Church. He noted that Bishop Odetoyinbo has been consolidating on the foundation laid by his predecessor and uplifted the diocese in all ramifications to make it the model diocese of the Church in Nigeria.

He disclosed that, among other spiritual and pastoral achievements, the bishop has within the short time of his mission of Christ in the diocese. M. Adamolekun outlined the roles being played by the Catholic Men Organization as fathers of the diocese and leading by example, the women and the youths in all the expected duties are in support of the work of the Church. He described the relationship between the priests, religious and lay faithful as 100 percent cordial and very collaborative, adding that this really facilitated the successes recorded by the diocese so far, under the able leadership of the invaluable local ordinary, Most Rev. Peter Odetoyinbo.

In his own contribution, Sir Christopher Onwuka, the Deputy Grand Knight of Abeokuta/Otta Sub Council of Knights of St Mulumba, expressed optimism that the coming of all the Catholic Bishops of the country to Abeokuta will open a new vista in the life of the Church in the diocese, with abundant blessings for the faithful and the entire people of Ogun State in general.

Sir Onwuka who spoke to the CSN News magazine team, on behalf of the Grand Knight of the association in the diocese Sir Adegbesan, He noted that: “If one bishop leads and you feel the presence of God, over 70 will be in quantum leaps. For over 70 bishops to come to our terrain for that short period, it is a lot of blessing for the land and we look forward to the prayers that will come from that meeting. We also look forward to the pronouncements because when Catholic Bishops meet, some landmark pronouncements are made and our joy will be that reference will be made to Abeokuta 2019; when such landmark pronouncements are made. Indeed, we are full of excitement and we look forward to their joining us.”
The officer of the diocesan Knights of St Mulumba also spoke on the involvement of the Knights in making the meeting of the Bishops successful and memorable by collaborating with the Bishop and other faithful of the diocese and actively participating in all the preparations for the visit. His words: “In our own little way, without going into details, we have tried to associate with the bishop and the church, to see how we can help in making it lighter for the bishop to host the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria”.

He also disclosed how the association has been involved in the evangelization apostolate of the diocese and helping to reach out to the people with works of charity. He declared: “In terms of evangelization, we have tried as much as possible to support the Church and in supporting the Church, we have made some contributions to the training of priests believing that the priests when they are on ground will go to the various parishes and will be able to reach out to people and encourage priestly and religious vocations among the young ones in the diocese. With regards to reaching out with the Good News of Christ, we have members who are strong in the group of Catechists as well as service leaders. We also embark on outreach as Knights of Saint Mulumba, by which we get across to people to see how we can be our brother’s keeper and let them have encounter with Christ and know that the Catholic Church is a Church that they can lean on.”

Sir Onwuka stated that Abeokuta diocese has been lucky with the choice of local ordinaries adding that the relationship between Bishop Odetoyinbo and the Knights have been most cordial. His words: “It has been wonderful really because I try to recall when he came in, so much euphoria, he came in from Ibadan then and we were quite excited to say yes we have a bishop to succeed the earlier one who was also been very vibrant. He did not create any gap which means he has taken us to a higher level. We have worked closely with him as Knights believing that we have a responsibility in the diocese to live up to, that we have to be guided by him to fill up the gaps that exist if any.”

Explaining the role of the Knights in the life of the Church, Sir Onwuka stated that apart from involving in the spiritual and pastoral activities of the Church helping her financially and providing succour for the needy, Knights of the Church have the responsibility of defending the Catholic faith without counting the costs. We all, irrespective of the association we belong collaborate to stand up and be the defenders of the faith, and be our brother’s keeper. He emphasized “That is precisely what we are doing as the Knights of Saint Mulumba in Nigeria. We are defenders of the faith and we have vowed to defend the Church with our time, treasure and talents.”

Sir Chris Onwuka, KSM

Bishop Odetoyinbo (3rd from right) with the CSN News Magazine team. L-R: Mr. Cajetan Ochi, Rev. Fr. Gregory Fadele, Communications Director, Abeokuta Diocese; Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, Deputy Secretary/Director Social Communications; Otunba Jide Fadugba-Pinheiro and Mr. Stephen Ofurum
Some children carrying the Nigerian flag to welcome the Nigerian Delegation to Uganda.

Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese and Bishop Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo of Oyo Diocese in front of the statue of St Andrew Kaggwa, one of the Ugandan Martyrs.

Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo Diocese (centre) with two Bishops of the Oriental Church.

Cross section of Priests at the celebration of the opening Mass.

Members of the Standing Committee of SECAM after the assembly and Golden Jubilee celebration.

Bishops of RECOWA/CERAO who attended the SECAM Assembly and Golden Jubilee at the Speke Resort at Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda.
CELEBRATIONS

CELEBRATIONS GALORE
The year 2019 has been one of memorable and indelible celebrations in the life of Nigeria’s Prince of the Catholic Church, Kogi State born John Cardinal Onaiyekan, the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja Archdiocese. For this servant of God and exemplary spiritual leader of the people, the year will go down in the annals of history as one in which our amiable father in the Lord found special favours with his creator and privileged to count his blessings in gratitude. Yes, Cardinal Onaiyekan has reasons to rejoice and show gratitude to God with Thanksgiving and celebration, accompanied by the people, most of whom he had impacted positively on their lives. The joys of John Cardinal Onaiyekan is not by his own making but by the grace of his Father in Heaven, his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ and His heavenly guide, the Holy Spirit – the infallible and impeccable Trinity.

In January, this year, the country stood still for this ebullient servant of God and Minister of the Catholic Church as he celebrated his 75 years on earth, and thanked God for making him an invaluable gift to His people, irrespective of their faith or status in life. The variety of people who attended the week long activities marking this celebration and their commendations, was indeed a testimony of Cardinal Olurunfemi Onaiyekan as an anointed man of God. In attendance at the ceremonies were a good number of his brother Bishops with who he has used the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria to promote peace, protect the interests of the poor, promote justice, equity, democratic stability and religious harmony, in the face of challenges. Also present, especially at the Book Launch for this occasion: dignitaries from all walks of life, emirs, traditional rulers, captains of industries, government officials, priests, religious, members of various religious denominations and other religions. It was indeed a historic celebration of a man of God who is the beloved of many and whose love and affection for humanity transcends, ethnic, religious, tribal and political and social status differences. It was during this celebration that Cardinal Onaiyekan officially announced, through a World Press Briefing his pending retirement as the Archbishop of Abuja, having reached the canonical age of retirement stipulated by the Universal Church.

Eight months after, precisely, Sunday August 4, 2019, Nigerians of all different life status gathered again to give honour to whom honour is due; and the occasion was the golden jubilee of the priestly ordination of John Cardinal Onaiyekan, in the Order of Melchizedek in the Lord’s vineyard. The celebration was marked with the launching of the Book: Thy Will Be Done: A Portrait of John Cardinal Onaiyekan on Thursday, August 1, at the Holy Trinity Parish Events Centre. This was followed by the ordination of two new priests for the Archdiocese – Deacons Joseph Toluwalope Obada and Neibo Om’ojo Boniface Achor on Saturday August 3rd. The ceremony was climaxed with the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass to mark the Silver Jubilee of the erection of Abuja Archdiocese which the Cardinal has led meritoriously for the benefit of humanity to the greater glory of God. The two events took place at the Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral, Garki, Abuja. Again the attendance at this ceremonies, though low keyed; critics across ethnic and status divide. It was a clear indication of vintage John Cardinal Onaiyekan whose relationship with fellow human beings is encapsulated in the ways of Christ, his Lord and Master. The celebration like the one of January also featured a World Press Briefing and fund raising for the completion of the Twelve Apostles Cathedral Church for the Archdiocese.

At the ordination ceremony, Cardinal Onaiyekan who was the consecrating prelate reminded the new priests of their special calling and the need for them to be steadfast in their vocation. At the celebration’s reception, was accolades galore by people from all walks of life in appreciation of the invaluable role Cardinal Onaiyekan has played in the spiritual, pastoral and temporal life of many, within and outside the Catholic Church, in Nigeria and the diaspora.

In his address at the Thanksgiving Mass, the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria and Archbishop of Benin City Archdiocese, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze described Cardinal Onaiyekan as a great spiritual leader and true teacher of the faith. His words: “He stands out as a highly respected advocate of the masses, a learned figure with great wisdom in both religious and circular issues. The CBCN President continued: “If you are on the right path of truth, he will support you, if you are not, he will speak out, especially against any anti-people policies.” Expressing that the Church in Nigeria is grateful to God, satisfied and joyful in celebrating Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop Akubeze called on Catholic priests to emulate the life and sterling qualities of the celebrant. Archbishop Akubeze also used the occasion to congratulate the faithful of Abuja Archdiocese for the choice of Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama as the Co-Adjutor Archbishop of the
Archdiocese; describing him as a knowledgeable cleric with good pastoral skills and administrative ingenuity. He added that Archbishop Kaigama had meritously managed the affairs of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria at the time he was the President of the body.

Also speaking at the ceremony, the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi, congratulated the jubilarian Cardinal and delivered the special message from the Holy Father, Pope Francis which he read to the joy of all the people present at the ceremony. In the good will message, the Holy Father congratulated Cardinal Onaiyekan and stated that his works as the Prince of the Catholic Church will never be in vain. He also thanked the priests and the faithful of Abuja Archdiocese for supporting the Cardinal.

Messages were also received from Religious Congregations, sodalities societies, associations and individuals. These included: the management and staff of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); whose message was delivered by the Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi; Sisters of Daughter of the Divine Love Congregation, who through their Mother General, Sr. Anastasia Dike stated: “Through your unique pastoral and administrative acumen, the Catholic Church in Abuja has indeed witnessed tremendous growth and progress within 25 years of its creation under your leadership”; and the Rector, team of formation, staff and seminarians of Saints Simon and Jude Minor Seminary, Kuje, Abuja.

In response, the celebrant was full of gratitude for all those who attended the ceremonies and those who have supported him in his mission in the service of God and humanity. Cardinal Onaiyekan also used the occasion to call on the faithful of the Archdiocese not to rest on their oars until the building of the new Cathedral is completed. He also appealed to the Federal Government to contribute to the building of the Cathedral pointing out that it will enrich the aesthetic environment of the entire landscape of the Federal Capital Territory.

OWERRI CELEBRATES SILVER JUBILEES OF ARCHBISHOP AND PROVINCE

In the communiqué signed by Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna of Owerri and Bishop Augustine Ukwuoma of Orlu Diocese, President and Secretary of the Provincial Conference respectively, the Bishops declared: “God, in his inexhaustible mercy and goodness, has continued to ‘spare our nation from chaos, anarchy and doom’. In the dark clouds of Nigeria’s present uncertainties, God has this message for us: ‘Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.’ (Isaiah 35:4).”

They continued: “It is with this confidence, in spite of all the odds, that we are celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the creation and inauguration of the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province (1994 – 2019). As we gradually approach the Grand Finale of the celebrations, from Monday the 2nd to Saturday the 7th of September, 2019, we pray that the Jubilee becomes for us a veritable moment of thanksgiving and joy, and a welcome stimulus for deepening and strengthening our faith, hope and love.

The Provincial Local Ordinaries further stated: “By divine grace we have come quite some way since the establishment of our Province twenty-five years ago. A Jubilee is a time of conversion from our evil ways, in order to return to our roots, to uphold and re-embrace the cherished values of uprightness, resourcefulness and diligence. Such a spiritual exercise is necessary in the face of graces received as well as in the face of threats and challenges facing our people.”

The Bishops concluded: “The Jubilee is indeed a time of soul-searching for all of us in parishes and dioceses, in families and communities. While we are generally perceived to be God-fearing and religious, the craze for material wealth and the inordinate pursuit of worldly power and fame are eroding our Christian and traditional spirit and sense of honesty, hard work, cooperativeness, justice and accountability. It is for this reason that all of us are challenged to celebrate the Jubilee as a Kairos moment.”

The Silver Jubilee celebration started with a symposium at which Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna of Owerri and Bishop Lucius Ugorji of Umuahia and Apostolic Administrator of Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi congratulating Archbishop Anthony J.V Obinna
CELEBRATIONS

Ahiara Diocese, led a handful of the faithful of the province to discuss how to resolve and sustain the sacredness of the Church as well as reaffirm its oneness and unity. The ground-breaking event which took place Monday June 3, at the auditorium of the Seat of Wisdom Major Seminary, Ulakwo, Owerri North LGA; was also attended by the representatives of the Bishops of Okigwe and Orlu Dioceses. They were represented by Very Rev. Fr. (Prof.) Cajetan Ehiem and Very Rev. Fr. Ozioma Onyima respectively, while the Administrator of Aba Diocese was represented by Rev. Fr. Obinna Achilihu. The programme was also attended by religious and lay faithful from all the dioceses that constitute the province.

The grand finale of the Silver Jubilee Anniversary which took place in the state capital of Owerri featured three colourful and epoch making events. These are: the 25 years of the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province; 25th Anniversary of his Grace Archbishop Anthony J.V. Obinna as the Catholic Archbishop of Owerri Archdiocese and the 24th edition of the popular Odenigbo Lecture Series.

Events marking the double Silver jubilee celebration began on August 9th and reached its climax on Sept 5th and 6th with a Thanksgiving Mass by the celebrant, Most Rev. Anthony J.V. Obinna and Provincial Thanksgiving Mass by the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria Most Rev. Antonio Filipazzi.

The events which took place at the Maria Assumpta Cathedral Complex, Owerri, witnessed a great turn out of priests, the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province and numerous Catholic faithful from different parts of the world.

In his homily, at the provincial celebration Mass, the Bishop of Bauchi Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Hillary Dachelem thanked God for the numerous pastoral mile stones achieved by the archdiocese within the 25 years of its creation. He enumerated structures and institutions created and established within the period. He said all these have contributed immensely to the work of evangelisation in the Archdiocese. Bishop Dachelem then advised the dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri - Aba, Umuahia, Okigwe and Orlu to abide in Christ in order to make better progress. He reminded the faithful that Christ is the head of the Church.

In the homily at the Thanksgiving Mass for Archbishop Obinna’s celebration, the Bishop of Nsukka Diocese, Most Rev Godfrey Onah reminded the faithful that many people are looking to the Church for hope.

His words: “In the darkness and gloom that has enveloped the Church, many are looking expectantly on the Church for a ray of hope... Whether it is about Islamisation and Fulani or about Federal Government’s attempts to silence every form of opposition, people are asking what are the bishops doing? What is the Church doing?”

Expressing concern about the ambition of Christians for both religious and secular positions, Bishop Onah declared: “What have we as Christians done with positions of leadership, whether in the Church or in the larger society, that has made people forget that such positions are for service? What body language, what manner of leadership, from Bishops has led people now to talk of “struggling for the bishopric” or some priests positioning or posturing to be made bishops (even though that is a futile exercise)?”

He continued: “What have we done with our positions of service that now makes even members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life (Religious Priests, Sisters and Brothers) struggle and manoeuvre to be made Superiors General? People hardly ever struggle to serve. The struggle is usually for power and personal gain. It is my opinion that those who struggle and campaign to be made heads of the various bodies in the Church (clerical or lay) should never get it, because most likely, such persons are not seeking the positions in order to serve but for some other...

Cross section of the Bishops present at the Anniversary ceremonies
personal or selfish reasons."

Speaking on the life of the celebrant in the service of God and humanity as a Bishop, the homilist remarked: "Since leadership through service is not easy to find, we have good reasons to celebrate and to thank God when we find a good specimen of it. Ordained Bishop 4 September 1993 (26 years ago at the age of 47) and appointed Archbishop only 6 months later (while he was still trying to figure out what being a Bishop meant, Amarachi Obinna chose for his episcopal motto: "To serve God and His people."

He continued: "Before his episcopal ordination, Fr. Anthony Obinna was fully immersed, after a thorough specialized training, in the diakonia of the truth, as a lecturer at the Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri. There he was engaged in the service of divine truth: seeking it, loving it, embracing it and bringing it to others through education. This, says Pope St John Paul II, is a special service to humanity (Fides et ratio, 2). And since his elevation to the episcopal office, his dedication to this service has intensified, to the point of becoming a consuming passion."

He added: "Anthony Obinna is in love with the truth and seeks it diligently at all times, through prayer, meditation and study. Yes, he is a man of prayer ("a call for prayer: can we say the Rosary?"), a seasoned intellectual and an avid reader with a seemingly insatiable thirst for knowledge. This prepares him adequately for the special service of teaching the people of God and of proclaiming the truth as a prophet. A service that is highly needed in Nigeria at this moment.

In his congratulatory message, the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria urged the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province to let the Silver Jubilee celebration become a new beginning for the church. He stressed the importance of communion at all levels, warning the faithful not to seek to become ethnic champions but rather champions of Christ.

Responding Archbishop Obinna noted that some past events which took place in the Archdiocese would have put the Church on a "bad page!" But he pleaded for understanding, stressing that the Archdiocese was still young and should be giving time to "spring up" and mature.

After the Jubilee Mass, there was cultural display and entertainment from all the dioceses in the province at the Odenigbo Pavilion. Launch was also served.

*Story by Rev. Fr. Ray Nzereogu*

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**Sendforth pictures**

Priests who were part of the thanksgiving Mass for the sendforth for Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu and other Priests and Religious whose tenure ended at CSN last year.

Parishoners of St. Gabriel Chaplaincy presenting a gift to their former Chaplain.

The former Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu, Rev. Sr. Regina Tombere and Rev. Fr. Bernard Asogo, Family and Human Life and Education Secretaries respectively, being assisted by the CSN Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zachariah Samjumi to cut the sendforth cake.

Mmrs Ngozi Orakwe-Olkirika with members of Men of Discipline (MOD) expressing gratitude to Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu for his tenure as the CSN Secretary General.
The Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi has expressed concern that the communion among the faithful in the Church is more of external sign and devoid of love from the heart as directed by Christ. Archbishop Filipazzi made this assertion in his homily at the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass to mark the Silver Jubilee anniversary of the creation of Calabar Ecclesiastical Province. The ceremony took place at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Calabar, Cross River State, and attended by the Bishops of the suffragan dioceses, and dignitaries from all walks in the country.

According to Archbishop Filipazzi: “Communion among us in the church is a reality which is great, but at the same time very delicate and fragile. Perhaps externally we are in the church, in a diocese, parish, religious congregation or Catholic association, but in reality, there does not always exist among us a true unity of mind, heart and action.” He added: This happens when what keeps us united and is more important than our differences are not faith, charity, prayer, mutual services, witness of life but other goals and interests.”

The Apostolic Nuncio continued: “In this way unfortunately, our communities are divided within themselves, because we give pride of place to our kinship or friendships, our ethnic group, our ideas, projects, objectives, our selfish interests. This give rise to parties, fights, calumnies, hatreds.”

Archbishop Filipazzi stressed the innately motivated unity among the faithful make them credible agents of the gospel. He prayed that the Lord will us as individuals and as a community, from pride, greed, lies and all the vices that obstruct our union with God and among ourselves, and which are the true cause of all divisions not only within the Church, but also in the society.”

Using several documents of the Church and the life of the early Church to point out the invaluable role of ecclesiastical provinces in the life of the Church, Archbishop Filipazzi stated: “The mission and communion of the Church are precisely the two realities that illuminate the reason why ecclesiastical provinces exist.” He added: “They are also the arrival point, the fruit of missionary work, which allows the Church to consolidate itself in different parts of the world.”

The Archbishop reiterated the invaluable importance of the Eucharistic celebration describing it as “the
perfect sacrifice of thanksgiving because it renders the Sacrifice of Jesus present and operative.” The Apostolic Nuncio expatiated on the need and composition of the ecclesiastical provinces noting, among other reasons, that they facilitate the promotion of common pastoral action of different neighbouring dioceses. He also outlined the challenges of the celebration noting silver the jubilee celebration of the province is just one stage as there is the need for the Church in the area to consolidate on the successes achieved so far by reaching out to bring to the fold those who have not known Christ as well as bring back the strayed and lukewarm faithful.

He added: “Let us think of the need of having not only numerous, but truly saintly vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. Let us think of the families who should live to the full, their mission as fundamental cells of the Church and society.

The Metropolitan of the Province, Most Rev. Michael Ekuwem welcomed all those who graced the occasion and thanked the State Governor, Sir Ben Ayade for returning mission schools to the Church and asked him not to hesitate to return those still in the custody of government.

The CBCN delegation to the ceremony was led by the Vice President of the Conference, Bishop Lucius Ugorji and he congratulated the Local ordinaries and the faithful of the Province on the success attained so far in the last two and a half decades. Also in attendance were: The Governor of Cross River State, Sir Ben Ayade; who reiterated his commitment to the Catholic faith and assured remaining a Catholic till death. The Governor of Akwa Ibom State was represented by the Secretary to the State Government, Mr. Emmanuel Ekuwem. Members of the CBCN present at the ceremony included: Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Owerri; Bishops: George Dodo of Zaria, Martin Uzoukwu of Minna, John Okoye of Awgu, John Ayah of Uyo; John Niyiring OSA, of Kano; Donatus Akpan of Ogoja and Anselm Umoren, Auxiliary Bishop of Abuja. Also in attendance were: Archbishops Anthony Ukpo, emeritus of Calabar; Felix Alaba Job, emeritus of Ibadan; while the Archbishops of Kaduna and Lagos were represented by Rev. Fr. Daniel Kyom and Msgr. Anthony Obanla, respectively. The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) was represented by Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, Deputy Secretary General and Director of Social Communications and Rev. Fr. Ukeme- Abasi Bassey, Personal Asistant to the Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi.

The Ecclesiastical province of Calabar, which was created in 1974 comprise of: Calabar Archdiocese, and the dioceses of Ikot-Ekpene, Ogoja, Uyo and Port Harcourt.
ARCHBISHOP VALERIAN OKEKE CELEBRATE 16th ANNIVERSARY

The Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha, Most Rev. recently hosted guests from different walks of life to celebrate the 16th anniversary of his Episcopal ordination and installation as the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha.

Archbishop Okeke who celebrated the occasion with a Thanksgiving Mass also hosted Guest to an after Mass luncheon. The highlight of this year’s celebration was the investiture of the lay faithful of the Church as Knights of the Catholic Church.

The ceremony was attended by many dignitaries from different parts of the state and neighbouring areas. Also in attendance was the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese, Most Rev. Denis Isizoh, priests, religious, Knights of the Church and lay faithful. The two new Knights also entertained guests at their various reception centres.
CELEBRATION

THE NINE NEW PRIESTS OF ONITSHA ARCHDIOCESE

What is partly responsible for the situation of marriages today is that today’s generation of young people go into relationships with skewed values. Many young people want to marry a wealthy partner and are desperately seeking a life of comfort without seeking the values that make a happy and holy life. They therefore end up mortgaging their lives and exchanging their happiness for the temporary pleasures of life.”

–Most Rev. Amselm Umorem
Auxilliary Bishop of Abuja
Holy Cross Cathedral hosts Crème of the Nigerian Society for Archbishop Martins’ 60th Birthday Thanksgiving Mass

Story by Tony Agbugba

All roads led to the Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos, on Saturday June 1, 2019; for the Thanksgiving Mass and book launch to climax the one week of activities organized to mark the 60th Birthday anniversary of the Metropolitan Archbishop of Lagos Archdiocese, Most Rev Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins. The celebration programme started on Monday 27th May, with the Archbishop meeting with children and youths of the Archdiocese at St Agnes, Maryland. This was followed by a visit to Mother Teresa’s Home, Ketu, on Tuesday and a meeting with the less privileged at Mushin, on Wednesday. This was followed by a reception at Regina Mundi Catholic Church, Mushin.

The celebration was climaxed with a Thanksgiving Mass held at the Holy Cross Cathedral with the celebrant as the Chief celebrant. It was attended by a powerful delegation of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, led by its President and Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze. Also present were John Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja, the Emeritus Archbishop of Lagos, Anthony Cardinal Okogie, dignitaries from all walks of life, priests, religious, Knights of the Church and lay faithful from different parts of the country. Also in attendance leaders of other Christian denominations, traditional rulers, government functionaries, and other dignitaries from all walks of life. Priests and religious form different parts of the country, Knights of the Church, leaders of various societies and sodality groups and lay faithful of the Church were also in attendance.

The celebration of the Mass was followed by a grand reception in honour of the celebrant at the City Hall, Lagos. Other activities included the unveiling of the Archbishop Martins Youth Development and Empowerment Foundation (AMYDF) and the presentation of two books written by the celebrant and titled: The Grace to Live (compilation of his homilies) and The Voice of A Shepherd.

In his homily at the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass, the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Msgr. John Aniagwu spoke on the need to give gratitude to God for hallmark achievements, like notable birthday anniversaries, as the celebrant is doing. The homilist also used the occasion to enumerate how God has been merciful and kind to Archbishop Martins, through his achievements in the episcopate of the Archdiocese of Lagos. Msgr. Aniagwu noted that the Archdiocese under the shepherdship of the celebrant witnessed enormous growth spiritually, pastorally and in the provision of essential social facilities for the benefit of the faithful and people of Lagos in general. Msgr. Aniagwu who described the celebrant as a very committed and focused Shepherd desirous of ensuring continuous growth and development in the Archdiocese, however advised him to maximize the utilization of the human resources available in the Archdiocese, however advised him to maximize the overwork load and find time to relax.

Also speaking at the ceremony, Anthony Cardinal Okogie admonished Archbishop Martins to redouble his efforts at sustaining the uniqueness of the Catholic Church in Lagos as a rallying point for unity and harmony among the various communities living in the city. Describing Archbishop Martins as a beacon
of hope, Cardinal Okogie declared: “Your strides in social, educational, medical, spiritual and pastoral achievements remain testimonies of your great endeavours of spreading the Word of God with every available means.”

In his own address, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze described the celebrant as a gift of God to the Church in Nigeria. He added that Archbishop Alfred Martins “is so humble and gentle; a deep thinker, considerate, compassionate, a great intellectual and a philosopher who enriches discourses with new insights to old problems.” He continued: We need to thank God for a man whose simplicity did not change even when he was elevated to the Episcopal status. We need to thank God for man who when transferred to the See of the Archdiocese of Lagos, one of the ecclesiastical circumscriptions with the most population of Catholics remained humble and spiritual. We need to thank God for blessing Lagos, Nigeria and the entire world with this quintessential servant of the Church.”

Unveiling the plaque for his Foundation that will effectively and practically address the issue of youth employment in the Archdiocese, the celebrant, Archbishop Martins reiterated his commitment to impacting positively on the lives of youths in the country, especially in Lagos Archdiocese through the foundation known as Youth Development and Empowerment Foundation (AMYDEF). He noted that his action was motivated by his concern and desire to address the growing rate of unemployment in the society, particularly among the youths. In ensuring the realization of the project, Archbishop Martins disclosed that all the proceeds from his two books launched at the birthday ceremony will be used to kick-start the foundation.

**ARCHBISHOP ABEGUNRIN CLOCKS 70; CELEBRATES FOUR DECADES IN THE LORD’S VINEYARD**

All roads leads to the premises of the Church of the Ascension, Bodija, Ibadan; where the faithful of Ibadan Archdiocese will host guests from all over the country for the 70th Birthday celebration of their Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Gabriel ‘Leke Abegunrin. The programme, which is expected to be attended by numbers of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, after their busy 2019 Second Plenary in Abeokuta, Ogun State; of the country, begins with a Gala Night scheduled for Friday, September 20. It will be followed by the Birthday Thanksgiving Mass, inside the Church of the Assumption, on Saturday, September 21. The ceremony will be rounded up with a reception to be held at the Pope John Paul Hall, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Catholic Church, University of Ibadan, Agbowo, immediately after the Mass.

Archbishop Abegunrin who was installed the Archbishop of Ibadan Archdiocese on Friday, January 24, 2014; was born on September 26, 1949. It will be recalled that on April 21, Archbishop Abegunrin celebrated the 40th anniversary of his priestly ordination at the St. Mary’s Cathedral, Oke Padi, Ibadan, Oyo State. The ceremony was attended by dignitaries form different spheres of life including representatives of the parishes in the Archdiocese.

In his homily at the celebration of the Mass, Rev. Fr Kenneth Adesina, formator and lecturer at the SS Peter & Paul Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan; said, “the Church is witnessing to the resurrection of Christ in the priesthood today. He added: “Though Archbishop Abegunrin does not want people to celebrate or talk about him, but we need to appreciate him.

Archbishop Abegunrin dancing to the Altar with the faithful, when he celebrated 40 years of his priestly ordination early in the year, at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Oke Padi, Ibadan, Oyo State.
CELEBRATIONS

2019: Year of Jubilees for Rev. Frs. George Ajana and Anthony Ijasan

Jubilees are occasions for showing gratitude to God for his mercies and blessings. Hence, they are seasons of celebrations to acknowledge God’s goodness and graces in our lives. But the joy becomes greater, when in one year one has the rare opportunity of celebrating jubilees in different phases of one’s life. This is the case with Rev. Fr. George Olusegun Ajana, the National Director of Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) and Rev. Fr. Anthony Oluwole Ijasan, the President of the Diocesan/Religious Directors of Communications of the Church in Nigeria. For these two sons of Ekiti State and priests of Catholic Diocese of Ekiti, God has really granted them the special grace of celebrating two jubilees in one year. First, this year, the two priests clocked 50, to qualify to be counted among age Golden Jubilarians.

In the same vein, the two priests answered the call to serve God in his vineyard, 25 years ago; thus, in October this year, they will both celebrate the Silver Jubilee anniversary of their priestly ordination. In the present day world, that is riddled with hustle and bustle of life, attaining age 50, deserves celebrating and giving thanks to God. And this is what these young servants have done, when, recently they were joined by family members, colleagues, friends and well-wishers to rejoice in the Lord with Thanksgiving Masses for attaining the Golden age. While Fr. Ajana hosted his guests in Abuja, Fr. Ijasan was at home in his parish- St, Fidelis Catholic Church, Ado- Ekiti; to give a sumptuous reception to family members and friends from different parts of the country.

FR. AJANA CELEBRATES WITH CHILDREN OF ORPHANAGE HOME

In Abuja, Rev. Fr. George Ajana started his celebration with the hosting of his priest-classmates at a meeting held at the CSN Resource Centre Abuja, from May 7 - 9, 2019. The annual meeting of the group was rounded up with a dinner to kick-start the celebrations of the 50th birthday and 25 years priestly ordination anniversary of the PMS National Director. A memorable occasion of reunion, it was for the priest-colleagues of the celebrant. This was followed by the Birthday Thanksgiving Mass by the celebrant on the very day he clocked 50; July 9, 2019. To make the day memorable, Fr. Ajana started with the celebration of the Mass with the children of the Orphanage of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy; Bwari, Abuja. In his homily at the Mass, Fr. Ajana encouraged the children to persevere and remain determined and focused as there is hope at the end of the tunnel no matter the circumstances at the beginning of life. He assured them: “There is hope in perseverance, once we put our...”

Rev. Fr. George Ajana with children of the Orphanage Home and the gifts he brought for them
Fr. Ijasan holds Night of Reunion in Ado-Ekiti

The celebration of the 50th Birthday ceremony of Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan started in the evening of June 25, with a special reunion night dinner for many of his priests colleagues, family members, parishioners, Sisters of St Michael Archangel Congregation, parishioners and next door neighbours of the celebrant and other friends of the secular world, most of whom have not seen each for many years. It was indeed a night of exchange of banter and back slapping, reminiscent of a reunion of old school mates. There was enough to eat and drink for the over 150 guests present at the ceremony. The ceremony took place at the hall of St. Fidelis Catholic Church, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State; where Fr. Ijasan is the parish priest.

The following morning June 26, the day of the celebration, guests from different walks of life, including top Government functionaries gathered inside the Church for the birthday Thanksgiving Mass, with the celebrant as the chief celebrant, assisted by about 100 priests from all the dioceses in the Southwest region of the country. Also in attendance was the Catholic Archbishop of Ekiti Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Felix Femi Ajakaye, who while speaking at the occasion emphasized that the redemption of the image of the Nigerian nation is the responsibility of all Nigerians, irrespective of their status, religion, ethnicity or position in the society. He therefore challenged all Nigerians to be proactively responsive to their responsibilities in their respective ways of life and situations. He added that making Nigeria great is not the responsibility of government alone. The Bishop noted that: “If those in authority are found wanting, this does not mean the followership should follow their footsteps, but rather play their respective roles positively in whatever position they are, to make the country better”.

Bishop Ajakaye described Fr. Ijasan as a pleasant person to be with, somebody who listens and takes corrections, and an achiever of note in his chosen vocation. While urging the celebrant to be more committed in his apostolate. He admonished the celebrant to advance with age and continue to use his talents for God for the benefit of humanity. Bishop Ajakaye also used the occasion to congratulate the Ijasan Family for giving two of their sons to work in the Lord’s vineyard for the salvation of souls.

While congratulating the celebrant, who will also celebrate the Silver jubilee of his priestly ordination later in the year, Bishop Ajakaye urged him to use the...
day’s celebration for stock taking on his life, noting that half a century in life offers a good opportunity to thank God for His mercies and recapitulate on how far one has performed in life.

In his homily at the Mass, Rev. Fr. Benedict Bimbola Joseph stated that anniversaries give us the opportunity to show gratitude to God for His love, goodness and compassion, as well as help us in retrospect about our life with a view of planning for a fruitful life after death in heaven.

Speaking on the life of the celebrant, Fr. Joseph declared: “Fr Ijasan Anthony has the ability to manage situations, especially, the worrisome situations that life present”. The homilist continued: “What I want to say next is true and I mean it in all honesty. He also continued: “I have always wondered how it is possible for Fr Tony to sustain this value. I have observed for long that in his “lowliness” Fr Tony feels more than comfortable among any group he chooses to relate with and most times he is found among the notables in the community, and even leads them in discussions and activities in many instances. He carries himself with an enviable sense of pride.”

In his message of gratitude, the celebrant thanked the Catholic Bishop of Ekiti, Most Rev. Felix Femi Ajakaye, members of his family, fellow priests, Sisters of the St Michael the Archangel Congregation, the parishioners of St Fidelis Catholic Church; those who have accompanied him on his journey of life, particularly in his 25 years in the Lord’s vineyard as a priest; as well as all those who have come to celebrate the golden jubilee with him.

Meanwhile, all hands are on deck to make the Silver Jubilee anniversary of the celebrant a very memorable in gratitude to the goodness of God to him for serving as a servant of God in his vineyard for the salvation of the people. It is expected that family members, friends and well-wishers will join Fr. Ijasan for the anniversary thanksgiving Mass and reception on October 8, 2019.

**FR PAUL ETAFO UBEBE OMV CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY**

Saturday the 29th of June saw family, friends and well-wishers of Very Rev. Fr Paul Etafo Ubebe OMV (the Delegate Superior of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Nigeria) gathered at St Mary’s Catholic Church, Tudun Wada, Lugbe, Abuja to celebrate his 10th Priestly Ordination Anniversary. The ceremony began at about 10am with the Holy Mass. In his homily, Rev Fr Mathias Iheonu CMF (the Parish Priest of St Jude Catholic Church, Zuba) stated that Very Rev Fr Paul is blessed to have a double barrel celebration as today the 29th of June the Church celebrates the feast of SS Peter and Paul and as he also chose the day to mark his 10th priestly anniversary even though the original date was 27th of June. In explaining the readings, Fr Matthias emphasized on the Gospel which was taken from Matthew 16:13-19. He said there are three highlights to this which are: 1. Confession; 2. Persecution; 3. Prayer. He went ahead to ask the question Jesus asked his disciples “who do people say I am”? He posed this question to the celebrant asking him who Christ is to him. Fr Mathias reiterated that the answer is personal and based on his relationship with God. He further asked that would he go the way of Peter saying “you are the Christ the son of the living God” or go the way of others. He stressed that some people confess Christ, when the going is good and deny him when the going is bad. Fr Mathias advised that going by the way things are in the present day Nigeria where
the Church is under attack and the killing of priests is increasing by the day; there is no better time to stand for Christ and confess him as Christians.

Talking about the second point he raised earlier which is persecution, he quoted Acts 12, where Paul persecuted the Christians of the early church and how he got Peter arrested because the people supported him. In the light of the above he said “when you do good, you have followers and when you do bad, you still have followers. He advised the celebrant, Very Rev Fr Paul Etafo Ubebe to carry out his duties diligently without fear or favour as the Delegate Superior of the congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Nigeria. He admonishes that people of God should carry out constructive criticisms to help their priests and not destructive criticisms that will destroy them. He quoted psalm 69 vs 6 “Lord may I never disappoint those you have entrusted into my care.” He advised the celebrant to be upright and prudent.

On the third Highlight “Prayer” Fr Mathias quoted John 15v 5 “cut off from me you shall do nothing. He advised that he should pray without ceasing and that he should always go to the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, he asked the people of God to always remember their priests in prayer. “We shouldn’t only ask for prayers from our priests but we should always pray for our priests as they too need our prayers and maximum support to succeed in their priestly endeavors,” he said.

After the Mass, a reception was held in honor of the celebrant. The highlights of the reception were the cutting of the anniversary cake, refreshment, presentation by pupils of Lanteri Marian Academy, dance by different cultural groups, a saxophonist and other side attractions.

In his vote of thanks, the celebrant, Very Rev Fr Paul Etafo Ubebe, thanked the parish Priest of St Mary’s Catholic Church, Tudun Wada - Fr Emmanuel Gusha, OMV. He also appreciated the support of the associate priest Rev Fr Daniel Damisah OMV, the parishioners, the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, his family, friends and well-wishers who graced the occasion and prayed for journey mercies to their destinations.

On Sunday June 2, 2019, Pa Dominic and Nympha-Mary Okoli, were joined by members of their family, friends and well-wishers to give gratitude to God in commemoration of the 55th anniversary of the coming together as husband and wife. The ceremony took place at St. Patrick Catholic Cathedral, Awka, Anambra State.

The Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Jonas Benson Okoye who presided at the celebration of the Mass, thanked God for the successful union He blessed the couple with for the past 55 years. The bishop congratulated the couple for the witness which they bore to successful marriage, saying that the golden jubilee plus five wedding anniversary was a source of encouragement to young and upcoming couples.

Pa Dominic & Nympha-Mary Okoli, flanked by two of their four children coming for thanksgiving with family and friends.
CELEBRATIONS

Bishop Okoye, who decried what he described as the alarming marriage cases in the Ecclesiastical Marriage Tribunal, said the 55th wedding anniversary was a pointer that couples could stay married for 50 years and more, without divorce and broken marriages.

The couple, going down memory lane on the five decades plus five togetherness, described their anniversary ceremony as “the celebration of togetherness,” which according to them had been motivated by love, trust, patience, understanding, dedication, perseverance and the grace of God. They thanked God for His many blessings; including the gift of four successful children, six grandchildren, healthy good life and many more.

*Story by Ifeoma Ezenyilimba*

**HON ROTIMI AMAECHI AT 54; PLEDGES MORE SUPPORT FOR THE NEEDY**

The Minister of Transportation, Honourable Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi celebrated his 54th birthday anniversary with a thanksgiving Mass at the St Gabriel Chaplaincy Church, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi, Abuja, on May 28. It was attended by family members, friends and well-wishers and the parishioners of the Chaplaincy.

The Mass was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Chris Anyanwu, CSN Director of Social communications and Deputy Secretary General, who also preached the homily.

In his homily, Fr. Anyanwu described the peace bequeathed to humanity by Christ as an everlasting inheritance that guarantees everlasting joy and love in heaven at the end of our sojourn on earth. Using the Gospel reading of the day to buttress his point, Fr. Anyanwu told the congregation that: “In today’s Gospel, we are reminded that whatever we do must be propelled by the love of God.”

Using the readings of the day to draw an inference on the life of the celebrant, Fr. Anyanwu described Honourable Rotimi Amaechi as a child of grace and destiny; pointing out that at the age of 54, he attained the heights of his political career and is celebrated as a noble father and role model to many.

He added: “One of the things that have endeared many people to Amaechi is his boldness and honesty”, describing these and other noble humble traits of the celebrant as an uncommon spiritual gifts. The homilist however added that the feats the celebrant has attained did not come on a platter of gold as he has experienced many challenges in life. Outlining the invaluable contributions of the celebrant to many people and the society in general, especially the less privileged, poor and needy; Fr. Anyanwu emphasized that the essence of good life is to glorify God for the common good of all, especially the needy.

In his words of appreciation at the end of the celebration of the Mass, Honourable Amaechi expressed his gratitude to the people, especially the faithful of St Gabriel Chaplaincy who have graced the occasion. He went down memory lane about his life noting that he was not born with silver spoon, gave gratitude to God for what he has achieved in life so far, and the opportunity to be at the service of humanity, especially the poor, without counting the costs. The celebrant assured the people that he would continue to serve humanity by supporting the needy, the poor and the marginalized. To mark the day, Honourable Amaechi made donations of invaluable measure to support the faithful of the diocese assuring that he would always respond to the needs of the Chaplaincy as often as possible. The Minister of Transportation assured that he would not renege in his steadfastness to the Catholic faith and continue to serve humanity to the glory of God.

*In order not to be a victim of fake news, it is important to know that behind every fake news is hidden the interest of some sectors, benefitting economic, ideological, political or party agendas. It is not concerned with the truth or events or the common good.*
It was celebration of gratitude to God at the Lekki premises of the Lumen Christi Television Network, in Lagos; when on Tuesday, May 21st; The proprietor, Prince Soji Olagunju, management and staff of the country’s foremost Catholic Television station and the icon of the Church’s electronic evangelization apostolate champion, hosted dignitaries from all walks of life on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the station.

The ceremony, which took place at the Alpha & Omega hall of the complex of the Television company; started with the celebration of the Thanksgiving Mass presided over John Cardinal Onaiyekan, the Archbishop of Abuja who was also the guest speaker at the occasion. Other concelebrating Bishops included: Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins, the Metropolitan of Lagos Archdiocese; Archbishop Gabriel Abegunrin of Ibadan, Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo, Bishop Paul Olawoore. Co-Adjutor Bishop of Ilorin and Bishop Francis Adesina of Ijebu-Ode Diocese. Also present was the Archbishop Emeritus of Lagos, Anthony Cardinal Okogie, Monsignori, priests, religious and lay faithful from different parts of the country.

During the Homily, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Lagos, in his homily at the Mass, Archbishop Alfred Martins emphasized that a lot of significant events take place daily without being noticed but the event of the 5th anniversary of LCTN will not go unnoticed. He emphasized that the good news preached by Jesus has been handed on to us from one generation to the next. The Archbishop stated further that the day’s celebration is the advancement of the good news by Prince Soji Olagunju and his family through the LCTN in the last 5 years. Stressing the need for Catholic to take their faith seriously Archbishop Martins hinted how much the network has gone far and wide. He declared: “Like people called to play in the Premiership, La Liga and other leagues, we are called to a league of faith, which we must profess without fear but with confidence. To proclaim the faith, we must know it’: He enjoined all and sundry to watch the LCTN and also avail themselves of all educating programs while reading other Catholic journals as well.

The celebration of the Mass was followed by a lecture, with John Cardinal Onaiyekan as the guest speaker. It was the Television station maiden annual lecture. Speaking on the topic, “The New Evangelization and Social Communications in the Church,” Cardinal Onaiyekan reminded the hierarchy of the Church in Nigeria that evangelization was all about communications and challenged them to do more by ensuring that all the tools of modern communication are at its disposal of the Church to propagate the Good News of Christ to all corners of the world. Cardinal Onaiyekan also used the occasion to call on Christians in the country to commence the Christianization of Nigeria through their positive words and actions rather than bemoaning the alleged plot by some people to Islamize the country. Cardinal He also cautioned politicians and other powerful men in the society to desist from forcing their religion on Nigerians.

While noting that it was God’s will for the adherents of the two major religions – Christians and Muslims to live peacefully together, he equally stressed that the nation’s constitution was very clear on the provision for freedom of worship or for one to change one’s religion without any form of molestation. He declared: “It is better to live in peace, so I wonder why some people are making it impossible for Christians to worship God peacefully, particularly in the Northern part of the country. It is unfortunate because it is clear that what we are experiencing is a premeditated effort by some people to force their religion on others.”

Story by Tony Agbugba
The Nigerian Catholic Diocesan Priests Association (NCDPA) held their 32nd Annual General Meeting at the Catholic Media Centre, Kaduna, recently and at the end of their deliberations described education as an essential tool for good governance and mobilization of good leaders for the development of any nation. This point was asserted in the Resolutions adopted by members of the association, present at the AGM.

The AGM was attended by delegates from all the Archdioceses and Dioceses in the country and the resolution was signed by Very Rev. Fr. Sylvester Onmoke and Rev. Fr. Francis Ikhniosime, National President and Secretary of the association respectively. The theme for the AGM was: The Imperative of Good Governance for A Secure and Prosperous Nation.

While calling for prayers for the leaders of the nation in this time of trials, the association stated: “We are not despaired despite insecurity, corruption and bad governance. We rely on God with unwavering hope as we call for untiring prayers for our country, Nigeria, and for our leaders in these challenging times. The association noted that: “The fruits of good governance continue to be the yearnings of citizens of Nigeria and beyond,” adding that the country basically “cries for justice which is anchored on the dignity of the human person.” The association stressed the need for improved functional educational structure pointing out that the country is been derailed by poverty and insecurity.

The delegates at the AGM stated that: “It is sad to note that the doors to productivity through education have been attacked, thus the poverty of the mind and insecurity have found a place at the head of the governing system of our country, just in the same way as agriculture and transport structures are equally on the brink of collapse to mention but a few.” The delegates also called for a collaboration between the State and the Church in youth formation through advocacy and inclusion of basic principles of social teachings in the school curriculum at all levels; noting that good governance and security is a collective responsibility of all the people of the country.

In his homily at the celebration of the Mass to declare the Annual General meeting open; the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna Archdiocese, Most Rev. Matthew Ndagos noted that mismanagement of resources and absence of the presence of Government in some parts of the country have been responsible for the current spate of insecurity in the country. According to him: “Insecurity starts from where there is absence of government. The absence of government in certain parts of the country has brought us to where we are today” He added: “Our problem has always been the management of resources of the land.”

PRIESTS URGED TO BE HUMBLE

Humility has been described as an essential virtue for Catholic priests, to enable them fulfil their vocation faithfully in the Lord’s vineyard and lead the faithful in the right way to Christ. This assertion was made by the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja Archdiocese, John Cardinal Onaiyekan in his homily at the ordination of five new priests for the Archdiocese. The ceremony which was witnessed by many priests, religious and lay faithful from different parts of the Archdiocese; and families of the newly ordained priests, took place at the Church of the Archangels, Gaduwa, Abuja.

Cardinal Onaiyekan also used the occasion to call on Catholic Priests to remain steadfast in their vocation and avoid taking undue advantage of the faithful in their care. He reminded them that religious leaders should serve the faithful they are to lead to Christ and not exploit them. The local ordinary of Abuja Archdiocese declared: “We must remind them that their calling is to holiness, and sanctity of life for themselves and the people, especially the youths and children. Their mission should be to bring them nearer to God.” He urged the newly ordained priests to be focused on God to overcome temptations especially when working with young people. His words: “Keep your focus on God. You are weak but when you work with God, you become strong. Anytime you leave Him, you will fail. So live each day with the grace of God.” Noting that the Catholic Priesthood is not a business venture or an opportunity for amassing wealth, the Cardinal told the newly ordained priests: “Beware of the temptation of money, serve the Lord not for it but the zeal and heavenly reward.” Urging them not to carry out their duties grudgingly, Cardinal Onaiyekan noted that there is joy and gladness in serving the Lord because it is crucial to
Nigerians urged to rise above Ethnic, Religious Differences to tackle Insecurity

The Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah has expressed the need for the commitment of all Nigerians to harness the country’s diversity to make her a great nation. The Bishop made the call in his homily at the funeral Mass for late Chief Michael Onyema, the father of the Chairman of Air Peace, Chief Dr. Allen Onyema. The ceremony took place at St. Patrick Catholic Church, Mbosi in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Calling on all Nigerians to rise above ethnic and religious disparity and collaborate to address the challenges of insecurity ravaging the country, the Bishop noted that Nigeria was presently going through turbulent times characterized by banditry, kidnapping and herdsmen/farmers’ clashes.

According to him: “The greatness of this country is its diversity. We have not been able to manage our diversity.” He noted that the United States of America is the most diversified country in the world; but the country has been able to harness its diversity by giving inclusion to all groups. He advised that Nigeria should adopt a similar approach.

While noting that it was unfortunate that herdsmen were now being accused of any criminal acts across the country the Bishop was of the opinion that it was wrong to classify all herdsmen as criminals. He however, expressed optimism that the country would overcome these problems if it was able to properly harness and maximize its diversity.

Bishop Kukah eulogized the deceased for living an exemplary Christian life and bringing up his children to be detribalized, noting that this had made his first son, Chief Allen to marry from Kogi State. He added that the Air Peace boss had followed the footsteps of his father by giving employment to Nigerians without tribal or religious considerations. Also speaking, Chief Onyema urged Nigerians to continue to live in love and unity, adding that other criminal elements were taking advantage of the division in the country to carry out their nefarious actions.

Speaking on behalf of the Governors, Chief Willie Obiano of Anambra State described the event as a celebration of life because the late Chief Onyema lived a fruitful life. The funeral ceremony was graced by eminent personalities including Governors Godwin Obaseki of Edo and Ifeanyi Okowa of Delta States. Also present were: the former governor of Anambra State; Mr. Peter Obi, and Chief Timi Alaibe, former Chairman, Niger Delta Development Commission among others.

Speaking on the issue of security at another forum, in Abuja, Bishop Kukah cautioned against the use of hate speech against the Fulani people noting that this could not only puncture the fragile peace the country is presently enjoying but also fan the ember of ethnic violence that could lead to a genocide war. The local ordinary gave the warning while speaking at a colloquium on Fake News and Hate Speech, organized by the Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies, a unit of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN); Abuja.

According to the Bishop, the blanket and continued hate speeches against the Fulani herdsmen as being currently done on the social media, constitute a threat to the unity and peace of the country. He noted that hate speeches are known to have preceded any genocide experienced in any part of the world; he admonished that Nigerians “have to be very careful” before the situation degenerates beyond control.

Going down memory lane, the bishop reminded Nigerians: “yesterday it was the Igbos”; and “today, it is the Fulanis”. Bishop Kukah also spoke on the country’s new Passport booklet and the controversy associated with the use of the picture of a herdsmen on one of the pages, on the social media. He described the insinuations contained in the social media in this perspective as fake news.

Warning that the country is on a very dangerous precipice, Bishop Kukah called on the leaders of the nation, including those of stakeholder groups to help bring the situation under control. He admonished all Nigerians to be their brothers keepers and avoid ethno-religious profiling in dealing with each other. He also challenged the media to wake up to its responsibility in this perspective.

Earlier in his opening remarks, the Vice Chancellor of National Open University of Nigeria, Professor Abdalla Adamu, noted that the liberalization of the media space by technology has facilitated the easy spread of fake news and hate speech. He lamented the increase in hate speech in the country warning that it is not in the overall interest of the Nigerian society.
MARY, THE MOST INVALUABLE SOURCE OF HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

– Archbishop Akubeze

The President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria and Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze has described the Blessed Virgin Mary as the most invaluable and effective source for the holistic development of the world. The Metropolitan of Benin City made this assertion in his homily at the celebration of the Mass for the grand finale of the annual meeting of the Catholic Women Organization of Nigeria (CWON), held at the Mother of Redeemer Catholic Church, Warri, Delta State.

Pointing out that holiness comes from services to others, Archbishop Akubeze emphasized, that; “in the Blessed Virgin Mary, we discover authentic holiness of life that sanctify the world”. Speaking on the theme of the celebration - “Catholic Women Called to Holiness to Sanctify the World for Holistic Development; the CBCN President said the theme points to the significant role the holiness of Catholic Women can affect in the holistic development of the world, adding that the more Holy Women like Mary we have, the better for our society. He adds that holiness of life leads to development, while righteousness leads to growth that spreads to everyone.

Archbishop Akubeze stated that holiness of citizens of nations will necessarily lead to justice and peace, adding that it is apt for the women to focus is on holiness, as through holiness they will sanctify their families; the society and transform the nation. Using the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5:48, where Christ invites us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, with p9y other documents of the Church to buttress his point, Archbishop Akubeze stated that this statement is an invitation to a life of holiness. Referring to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in Lumen Gentium, no. 4, he said it explained the Universal Call to Holiness as thus;

Asserting that, Mary the mother of Jesus gives us a good example of how to contribute to development of the society through our personal sanctity; Archbishop Akubeze urged parents to teach their children and grandchildren the Catholic faith, the value of patience, perseverance, contentment and the need to avoid the temptation of the get-rich quick syndrome by any means. He also called on parents to teach their children to know that success is not judged only by financial power but more importantly by good name and by a blameless life.

Reiterating the importance of Mothers in development of every society, Archbishop Akubeze said; if Catholic Women in Nigeria decide to change the society they can do that through their individual families. He told them to be close to their children and never allow the pursuit of material wealth make them renounce from their maternal duty as no one can replace the role of a mother in the house and no house help can take the place of a mother. He added that the women that no father can take the place of a mother nor a school can take the place of a mother in the formation of child.

BEWARE OF SYCHOPHANTS, ARCHBISHOP OBINNA ADVISES IHEDIOHA

The Catholic Archbishop of Owerri, Most Rev. Anthony Obinna, has advised Governor Emeka Ihedioha of Imo State, to steer clear of sycophants, prophets, priests and occultic persons that may tempt him away from worshipping and serving the only one true God. The Archbishop gave the advice, while delivering the sermon, during the inter-denominational Service held at the Grasshoppers Stadium, Owerri to mark the inauguration Governor Ihedioha.

In the sermon titled: “Repent and Worship the True God Unwaveringly, Serve the People in Humility, Wisdom and Fortitude,” Archbishop Obinna noted that Imo State needs a true servant-leader who will be imbued with humility of Christ to wash our dirty feet and guide the affairs of the state uprightly and use the available resources of the state for the common good in a spirit of equity.

According to the Archbishop; “It is in the Davidic spirit of unwavering faith in the true God and continuous penitential prayer before God that we are here gathered praying for all Imo citizens, for all human beings and especially for our new governor-elect that we and he will ever make God our daily rock, our mighty fortress, day in day out. Fortunately the true
God has revealed himself not only as Sovereign Creator of the universe, as the Redeemer of wicked mankind and the Sanctifier of the defiled and degraded. “In the face of the resort to gods that are no God, powers that ultimately prove powerless, superstitions and attractions that prove dangerous and deceptive, I challenge you all and the governor-elect to steer clear of sycophants, prophets, priests, pastors, cultic and occultic persons and clubs that may tempt you away from worshipping and serving the one and only true God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has proved his absolute love for us all in the sacrificial death of Christ and proved his absolute power and sovereignty by raising Jesus from the shameful death unto the glorious resurrection.

Archbishop Obinna also admonished the people of the state to “Share in the same humility, wisdom and fortitude so that together with this new governor and those that will come hereafter, we can build a greater, more caring and united Imo family in the spirit of the Holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph whose statue stands beckoningly at the round-about before the Maria Assumpta Cathedral, a principal prayer centre in Imo State.”

Bishop Ezeokafor calls for Equity in Development

The Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese, Most Rev. Paulinus Ezeokafor has advised President Mohammadu Buhari to make equity distribution of amenities to all parts of the country, the hallmark of his second term in office. The Bishop made the call while speaking on the state of the nation at the St. Patrick’s Catholic Cathedral Awka.

Bishop Ezeokafor who expressed concern about the reported favours being granted some segments of the society on ethnic sentiment, especially the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria; noted that such ethnic motivated favours are not in the interest of the country and are: “recipes for disaster and time bombs waiting to explode.”

According to the bishop: “And you begin to ask yourself why this priority to Fulani and herdsmen. There was a time we were told to give them lands to keep their cattle and goods. You know definitely that cattle business is private. You don’t allow your goats or anything to destroy another’s business. But when it comes to the issue of this cattle, there is always sympathy and efforts to give them the best or special offers. It is not helping us. I don’t know, but if that is true, it is very dangerous;” he said.

Bishop Ezeokafor wondered why the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) were treated as terrorists, and big threats to the unity of Nigeria, while the herdsmen went about without fear. He questioned the rationale behind FG’s call
Four students of St John’s Science and Technical College, Alor in Indemili South Local Government Area of Anambra State, recently in faraway Tunisia, did the nation proud when they won the Bronze medal at the International Festival of Engineering, Science and Technology competition held in the North African country.

The four students, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four took part in the nine day competition (21 -29, March, 2019), along with their counterparts from thirty one other countries of the world, held in Monastir, Tunisia. The competition featured; scientific competition in different areas, aimed at developing the innovative skills of young scientist and encouraging them to apply their imagination and creativity in solving problems in the environment.

The 9-day festival, which took place in Monastir, Tunisia from twenty first to twenty-ninth March this year, was organized for students, aged between fourteen and twenty-four from over thirty one countries and featured a scientific competition in different areas, aimed at developing the innovative skills of young scientists and encouraging them to apply their imagination and creativity in solving problems in their environment.

The Bronze Medalists are: Ugwuishi Meshack Ogonna, Chuka-Umeora Onyedika Anthony, Nwachukwu Chukwuukwu Daniel and Machi Chukwuagbozie. Countries represented at the global competition included: Canada, Italy, South Korea, Turkey, China, Sweden, Ukraine, Malaysia, Brazil, Bosnia, Indonesia, Tunisia and South Africa. According to the School Manager, Reverend Father Dr Francis Unaegbu, who led the team to the competition with the Principal of the School, Samuel Otuba, the students achieved their remarkable feat with a device they called the Adaptable Alternative Power Supply for Sub-Saharan Africa. The device is an electric inverter with a solar panel that enables it to absorb energy from the sun, warehouse the energy in inverter and subsequently distribute it in households and offices as the case may be.

Another Global AwardFeat by Anambra State Students

It will be recalled that about seven months ago, six students of the Regina Pacis Model Secondary School, Onitsha, also in Anambra State, put the country on top of the technology map of the world following a global contest when they won the gold in another Scientific competition held in Silicon Valley, San Francisco, USA. The girls: Adaeye Onugbo, Nwabuaku Osai, Promise Nnalue, Jessica Osita, Vivian Okeye and Miracle Igboka, represented Nigeria and Africa at the global competition.
Peace Paramount To Global Harmony; Says Fr. Ralph Madu

The immediate past Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu has described peace, as a veritable vehicle for global development, harmony, justice, equity and human communality. He however added that peace can only be achieved through the collective responsibility of all peoples of the world, especially stakeholder groups.

Fr. Madu made this remark while delivering a lecture titled: Them and Us: Avoiding Conflicts and Working for Peace, at the installation of Rotarian Ohajunwa Chukwuemeka as the 19th President of Rotary Club of Owerri Central District 9142, Nigeria; at the Immaculate Hotels, Owerri, Imo State, recently.

The lecturer disclosed that his presentation is geared towards understanding the concept of peace and conflict to help the members of the Rotary Club “to understand and appreciate the enormity of the call God and humanity have placed in their hands and to pursue it with utmost devotion and religiosity.” The four areas of focus addressed by Fr. Madu were: concepts of peace and conflict; a cursory gaze at the crisis level of Nigeria; Rotary International as a veritable agent of peace and an overview of the role of Rotary Club in Nigeria.

Describing the word peace as a concept and a condition that has remained one of the most expensive things in the world right from the creation man, the lecturer went down the memory lane of history to outline how peace has been elusive in the world as a result of some scrupulous and self-conceited actions, greed and ambition of man, pointing out that: “In all the various myths and legends about the origin of war and conflicts in the world, the common denominator has always been because man went against an instruction given to him for his own good.”

Speaking on the Nigerian situation as an example with many references, Fr. Madu declared that: “The Nigerian scenario is most pitiable. The fear of each other and the hatred between the Christians and the Muslims which represent the two major religions in the country are very palpable. Nigeria has become a killing field as a result of the growing social, ethnic and religious intolerance. No year passes without the eruption of severe conflicts within and between ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria, especially in the North.”

The lecturer, however went on to commend the Rotary Club at both international and local levels for its commitment to the promotion of peace and peaceful co-existence among people of all races; but further challenged the association to be more visible in helping Nigeria to address her perennial challenges which include: corruption noted as being the root cause of the poverty problem in the country.

Papal Nuncio Dedicates Maiduguri’s New Cathedral

The Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Guido Filipazzi, during his visit to the diocese of Maduguri, performed two important functions, among other activities. These were the dedication of the newly build St Patrick’s Cathedral and the commissioning of the new diocesan secretariat. Archbishop Filipazzi was welcomed at the Maiduguri International Airport by the Local Ordinary of the diocese, Most Rev. Oliver Dashe Doeme, his Bauchi Diocese counterpart, Most Rev. Hilary Dachelem CMF, priests, religious, lay faithful and other dignitaries.

Archbishop Filipazzi who presided at the celebration of the Mass for the dedication of the new Cathedral, in Maiduguri; thanked the Bishop for inviting him. He said the Holy Father extends his greetings to the people of Maiduguri Diocese and appreciate the Augustinian Frs. from Ireland who brought about the existence of the Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri.

The dedication ceremony featured: the anointing the walls with Sacred Chrism, Incensing, lighting of candles and then’ the Eucharistic celebration. Towards the end of the Mass, some members of the church were honoured and invested with Papal Knights, the knight of St Sylvester by His Lordship Most Rev Dr. Hilary Nanman Dachelem. Those honoured at the ceremony were: Honorable Peter Byie Gumitha, Dr. Joseph A. Jatau, Dr. Francis Zirra, Major Gen John Samuel Nzarwa (Rtd) and Brig. Gen Sunday Igbindmuanhia. Also Papal Medals were awarded to Sir & Lady Charles Solomon Guary (Papal Knight).

In his own remarks, Bishop Oliver Doeme thanked all who attended the ceremony and prayed that the blessings of God will never depart from them.

During the visit, Archbishop Filipazzi also paid a courtesy call on the Shehu of Borno, Abubakar Ibn Umar Garba; who expressed delight at the coming of the Papal Nuncio to the area in spite of the security challenges in the area; and assured the Apostolic Nuncio of his continuous commitment to the promotion of peace and cordiality among the people of the area irrespective of their religious differences.

Responding, Archbishop Filipazzi thanked the Shehu of Borno for the kind gesture and hospitality shown to him. He presented a medal to the Shehu on behalf of the Holy Father Pope Francis; for “his endless support to the church in Maiduguri.”

Story by Lilian Francis Upuh
DEDICATION OF MAIDUGURI CATHEDRAL IN PICTURES

The Priests in the procession to the dedication ceremony.

Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi blessing the holy water to be used for the ceremony.

The Apostolic Nuncio cutting the tape to begin the dedication ceremony. Looking on is Bishop Oliver Doeme, the Local Ordinary of Maiduguri Diocese.

Bishop Oliver Doeme of Maiduguri accompanied by another Bishop entering the Altar.

Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi unveiling the Plaque of the dedication ceremony.

L-R: The Shehu of Borno, the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi and Bishop Oliver Doeme of Maiduguri, after the dedication ceremony.
While inaugurating the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in Uganda, in 1969, Pope Paul the VI enjoined the Bishops to be missionaries to the continent and evangelize her. His words: “You in Africa are now your own missionaries… You can, (in fact, you must) have an African Christianity!” At that unique occasion, the continent had about 50 Bishops, who were the founding members of the organization. Today, 50 years after, the continent’s hierarchy of the Church can boast of about 400 members, comprising of Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops. Thus, in 2018, a one-year long celebration was rolled out by the organization to mark this five decades of invaluable success of the Church in the continent, amidst challenges and difficulties. This year-long celebration, culminated in the grand finale one-week programme held in Uganda (where the journey started from July 21 and ended on July 29). The celebration which began with an opening Mass at the Cathedral Church of Kampala and ended with a closing Mass; also featured, the 18th Plenary Assembly of SECAM with the theme: Church-Family of God in Africa, Celebrate Your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ Your Saviour; presentation of papers by erudite scholars on the fate of the Church in Africa, vis-à-vis the continent’s hierarchy of the Church can boast of about 400 delegates, most of whom are representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the Church in the continent, delegates from the Church from different parts of the world, including a powerful delegation from the Vatican representing the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

In attendance were: Cardinal, Archbishops, Bishops, Clerics, Religious and lay persons. It was indeed a celebration of counting the blessings and charting the future for a more vibrant Church in the continent. It was indeed a memorable gathering for an indelible celebration of the continental Church. It was indeed a memorable reminiscence of how far, the association officially inaugurated on July 29, 1969 at Lubaga Cathedral, Uganda, by Saint Pope Paul VI; has gone in realizing the set objectives. Thus, in 2018, a one-year long celebration was rolled out by the organization to mark this five decades of invaluable success of the Church in Africa, amidst challenges and difficulties. This year-long celebration, culminated in the grand finale one-week programme held in Uganda (where the journey started from July 21 and ended on July 29). The celebration which began with an opening Mass at the Cathedral Church of Kampala and ended with a closing Mass; also featured, the 18th Plenary Assembly of SECAM with the theme: Church-Family of God in Africa, Celebrate Your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ Your Saviour; presentation of papers by erudite scholars on the fate of the Church in Africa, vis-à-vis the continent’s hierarchy of the Church can boast of about 400 delegates, most of whom are representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the Church in the continent, delegates from the Church from different parts of the world, including a powerful delegation from the Vatican representing the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

The Archbishop added: “Now, from barely fifty Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals who were present at the inauguration of SECAM in 1969 here in Kampala, Africa can now boast of over 500 Bishops and Archbishops and as many as 25 Cardinals, ministering to the Church on our continent and in the universal Church. From a population of about 40 million Catholics past fifty years of the life of the Church in Africa and her adjacent islands; and we shall listen to the voice of God in the Holy Scriptures, meditate on them, review our performance in the mission entrusted to the Church by her Saviour, and in the light of the Holy Spirit take up our mission of evangelization with greater zeal and focus.”

The celebration of the opening Mass was followed by the opening ceremony at which the President of SECAM declared the programme open and goodwill messages delivered including those of the Holy the Father and the Ugandan President. The Opening ceremony was facilitated by SEPACS President, Bishop Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo of Oyo Diocese, Nigeria. The opening ceremony was followed by a three-day intensive workshop at which scholars from different parts of the world, including Nigeria’s Rev. Sr. Professor Theresa Okure, made presentations. Subjects of presentations included: Contextualizing the Theme of the Workshop: “Church-Family of God in Africa, Celebrate Your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ Your Saviour” and Evangelization – Then and Now (The Kampala Heritage): A Pastoral Historical Journey of SECAM; Other topics...
addressed were: Globalization and Ecological Challenges; New Pastoral Strategies; Socio-Cultural, Political; Economic Challenges; and Possibilities (Occasions) for Missionary Activity in Todays Africa, and New Mentalities, New Spiritualities, New Pastoral Strategies.

The workshop was followed by the sessions of the 18th Plenary of the body at which only the Bishops and the Secretaries General of the various Conferences participated; and the Golden Jubilee celebration Mass, held on Sunday, July 28, 2019, with the newly elected President of SECAM; His Eminence Philippe Nakellentuba Cardinal Ouédraogo, Archbishop of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, presiding.

At the end of the proceedings, A Message was issued in which the Bishops, among other things; reiterated commitment to the spiritual and pastoral growth of the Church in the continent for the common good of all, especially the youths, the needy, the poor the marginalized and migrants. The document signed by His Eminence Philippe Nakellentuba Cardinal Ouédraogo, Archbishop of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and President of SECAM, stressed that Jubilee is a time of grace, as “it invites us to hold firm to our faith and undergo conversion.”

The Bishops also, committed, among other things to: To invest more deeply in the biblical, theological, moral and spiritual formation of all the baptized; to nourish them with the word of God and the sacraments, so that they may make the gospel penetrate all aspects of life. Encouraged by the example of the African saints, may they resist the diverse attractions of the new religious movements and ideologies that are contrary to the Catholic faith.

They resolved “to make the Jubilee a springboard for the new evangelization, through the participation of the Small Christian Communities, pious societies and new forms of religious associations; promote further the pastoral care of the family so that it can bear prophetic witness within the society; and to promote the human formation and the professional, moral and spiritual education of children and the youth and to help them to be more deeply rooted in the values of the gospel in order to prevent them from engaging in all forms of fundamentalism and violence.”

The Church in Africa is best summed up thus by Archbishop Burkle of Ghana in the opening Mass homily thus: Now, from barely fifty Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals who were present at the inauguration of SECAM in 1969 here in Kampala, Africa can now boast of over 500 Bishops and Archbishops and as many as 25 Cardinals, ministering to the Church on our continent and in the universal Church. From a population of about 40 million Catholics on the continent fifty years ago, we have every reason to celebrate a population of over 178 million, making about 17% (?) of the universal Church. And it has been acknowledged that the Church in Africa is the fastest growing in the world and also the most vibrant in her liturgical celebrations and her witnessing to the faith.”

He continued: “My dear People of God, the Church in Africa today has a fast growing population of local and indigenous Clergy, Religious and Consecrated Persons, a good number of whom are today on mission in countries in Europe, USA, Canada, in the United Kingdom, in Asia and in Latin America, etc., some as Fidei donum and others as missionaries to the “old Church” that one time sent us missionaries.

In addition to this phenomenal and exponential growth, the Church in Africa must celebrate also because in nearly all our countries, we are contributing greatly to the integral human development of our peoples, where we run hundreds of hospitals and clinics, health-care centers and provide the formation of competent and qualified health care professionals, educational facilities like schools and training colleges, universities and professional formation programmes; where we also are involved in forming the consciences of our political and professional elite, etc. Yes, Church-Family of God in Africa, celebrate your Jubilee!

And in his own comment, Bishop Emmanuel Badejo, the President of CEPACS and Bishop of Oyo Diocese, Nigeria; aptly sums up the Golden Jubilee celebration and the future of the Church in the continent thus: “Africa celebrates the grace that has brought the Church through many dangers tools and snares. Africa aims at victory over conflicts, violence, discrimination, bad governance, ignorance, poverty and terrorism. Yes, in spite of many false starts we have much to celebrate. And like Mary at Jesus’ feet AFRICA proclaims Jesus as Saviour but like Martha, Africa recommits to working hard to create a better continent for all her children and take her place among the world of civility and progress. God bless Africa.”

That indeed is the real story of the journey of SECAM and the invaluable grace of God on the Church in Africa. And the Church in Africa had every reason to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ for the good things He has done in the life of His Church in the continent; and her hope of being the future hub of the Church of Christ on earth.
WORDS OF WISDOM FOR AFRICAN POLITICAL LEADERS

The Bishops of Africa ended the Golden Jubilee celebration of the Inauguration of the Symposium of Ecclesiastical Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM); and the 18th Plenary of the Assembly with some words of wisdom for political leaders in the continent on how to address the challenges facing the continent and enhance her socio-economic and political situations. The advice was contained in the Resolutions adopted by the Bishops at the end of their Plenary session and signed by the new President of the organization and Archbishop of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Cardinal Philippe Ouédraogo.

Among other things, the bishops called on the continent’s political leaders to put her human and natural resources at the service of development, reconciliation, justice and peace noting that this will lift the people of the continent from poverty and protect them against other social vices.

The Resolutions titled: “That they may know Christ and have life in abundance” (Jn 17:3; 10:10); urged the continent’s political leaders to address the problems of migrants, refugees and all who are still victims of slavery and human trafficking, and offered to deepen their collaboration with the political leaders in achieving those demands for Africans. The Bishops reminded the political leaders that SECAM was aware that most Africans were confronted with the anguish of their people and that the body would continue to serve as a sign of hope to them. They declared: “The family founded on the union of man and woman remains the first place of evangelization; that is why SECAM has kept insisting on its importance, vocation and nature as ordained by God (cf. Gen. 2:24).”

President Signis World

In his homily at the closing Mass, the newly elected 1st Vice-President of SECAM, Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha, South Africa; advised Africans to be optimistic and have hopeful perceptions about the continent. His words: “There is what is called Afro Pessimism where everything bad is associated with Africa. As a reaction to this, there is what is called Afro Optimism, which tends to romanticize Africa as the Paradise. We must neither be overly pessimistic nor overly optimistic about Africa, but be Afro- realistic. The homilist who also advised the youths of the continent to resist pressures that come from their workplaces, families and the society at large; further stated: “Building on the strength of what is good, we can be encouraged to deal with and overcome what is evil,”

CARDINAL OUÉDRAOGO, ARCHBISHOP OF OUAGADOUGOU ELECTED SECAM PRESIDENT

H is Eminence Philippe Nakelltuba Cardinal Ouédraogo, Archbishop of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and Cardinal-Priest of Santa Maria Consolatrice al Tiburtino has been elected President of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of African and Madagascar (SECAM). Born on 25 January 1945, he was ordained Priest of Kaya, Burkina Faso on 14 July 1973. On 5 th July 1996, he was appointed Bishop of Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso and ordained Bishop of Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso 23 November 1996. He was further appointed Archbishop of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on 13 May 2009 and elevated to Cardinal on 22 February 2014.

On 22 February 2014, he was appointed Cardinal-Priest of Santa María Consolatrice al Tiburtino and installed Cardinal-Priest of Santa María Consolatrice al Tiburtino on 27 April 2014. He replaces Most Rev. Gabriel Mbilingi, Archbishop of Lubango, Angola, who had served a two-term mandate of six years. The 1st Vice President is Rt. Rev. Sithembele SIPUKA, Bishop of Mthatha, South Africa and the 2nd Vice President is Rt. Rev. Lucio Andrice MUANDULA, Bishop of Xai Xai, Mozambique. Rev. Fr. Terwase Henry Akabiam, from Nigeria, has also been appointed the Secretary General of SECAM.

It is increasingly important for us, as Catholic communicators, to model what it means to be positive and healthy citizens in the Digital continent, as the digital media environment was described by Pope Benedict.

– Helen Osman, President Signis World
Rising from their third Plenary held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; in May, this year, the Bishops of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOWA-CERAO) have called on governments of the West African sub-region to create a conducive atmosphere that will protect the youths of the sub-region “against ideologies that draw them to terrorists and criminal networks”. The call was part of the resolutions and recommendations taken by the Bishops during their Conference.

The theme of the Plenary was: The New Evangelization and the Promotion of Integral Human Development in the Church Family of God in West Africa. The document was endorsed by the President of the conference, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama. Speaking on the sub-theme: Youth, Faith and Migration: The Bishops declared: “We reaffirm our commitment in the pastoral of the youths that constitute the biggest part of our Church Family of God. We are conscious of their desire of happiness that leads many of them to migration and to the dramatical consequences of that plague.”

They continued: “We commit our church, pastors and community to be on the side of the youth, as we lend them an attentive hearing, as we encourage all the initiatives that keep the youth in their land and contribute to their wellbeing and as we promote their technical and professional training.” The bishops therefore called on governments of the region “to invest really in the youth with programmes for the youth in priority, and protect them against ideologies that draw them to terrorists and criminal networks.”

Other areas of concern mentioned in the Resolutions and Recommendations were: the progress of the Regional Conference, collaboration with ECOWAS, the role of the laity in the Church in the sub-region and the political situation in the sub-region. They called on political leaders to embrace good governance with respect for Constitution and the common good; and “to provide for political dialogue and integral and fair human development of the peoples”.

The Bishops also appreciated the people of consecrated life for their “prophetic witnessing”; and the message from the Vatican office of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, reiterating their commitment “to take up the various challenges of the New Evangelization in Africa, especially the economic, religious and pastoral challenges”.

Commenting on the workshop facilitated by Cardinal Turkson and his collaborators which focused on self-sufficiency of the Church in the sub-region, the Bishops stated: “It is with great interest that we welcome clarifications and exhortations of Cardinal TURKSON, Prefect of the Decastery for the service of Integral Human Development, and his collaborators. We are convinced of the need to work on the financial and material...
autonomy of our Churches, to put an end to the mentality of dependency."

They reiterated the commitment of all the Bishops to take initiatives in this direction and to create the conditions favoring the employment of young people in particular. They added: “We affirm our willingness to work with partners driven by the concern for social entrepreneurship and social impact investment. We are equally committed to achieve an efficient result, to invest in formation of the necessary human resources.”

The Regional Plenary Assembly which also featured an opening Mass was attended by about 200 Bishops from all the Conferences in the sub-region, while the opening ceremony and the conference proper took place at the Burkina Faso Government Conference Centre. The ceremony was also attended by the President of Burkina Faso, Richard Marc Christian Kabore accompanied by an entourage of top government officials and other dignitaries from all walks of life. Highlights of the plenary included the re-election of Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Nigeria as President of the Conference for a second tenure. His two vice presidents are: Bishop Jose Kamnate from Guinea and Bishop Alexis Koulablì from Cote d’ivoire.

The opening ceremony of the triennial event took place at the Burkina Faso Government Conference Centre, with officials of the government of Burkina Faso, led by the President, Richard Marc Christian Kabore in attendance. Also present were: the President of SECAM; representatives of ECOWAS and the USA Bishops Conference, among others were also present. In their goodwill messages. They speakers of the various organizations commended the Leaders of RECOWA-CERAO for their thoughtfulness. The session ended with the opening mass at the Cathedral of our Lady of Africa presided over by the President of RECOWA-CERAO, His Grace Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama in French to the amazement of all. The Mass on the 2nd day was said by John Cardinal Onaiyekan and homily delivered by Archbishop Augustine Akubeze, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).

SECRETARIES GENERAL OF BISHOPS’ CONFERENCES STRATEGIZE MORE VIBRANT SECRETARIATS

The three-day workshop and training organized for Secretaries General of the Bishops Conferences of the West Africa sub-region, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in May this year; was aimed at enhancing the activities of the administrative offices of the Bishops’ Conferences and make them more vibrant. This ultimate goal was highlighted in the communiqué issued by the Communications Directorate of RECOWA-CERAO, the organizers of the training programme. According to the statement signed by Rev. Fr. George Nwachukwu, the organization’s Director of Communications, the training programme was to re-awaken the spirits of the Secretaries General to their unique call as administrators of their various conferences.

The meeting of the Secretaries General, preceded the Regional Conference of the Bishops of the West African region and it was to reflect on the ways and means of improving their administrative capacity for more efficiency and better results. The statement further noted that one of the goals for organizing the training programme was to challenge the Secretaries General to greater efficiency while assisting and directing the bishops in collaboration for a more resourceful and vibrant Church in the continent’s sub-region.

Addressing the Secretaries General at the opening ceremony of the training, RECOWA-CERAO Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Joseph AKA noted that the training programme was organized in line with the call of modern day administration. He reminded the Secretaries General that “the duty of humbly getting the Bishops in their different conferences to do the right thing falls on them”.

Presentations were made by Mr. Niamba Lassina nd Mr. KONE Mamidou and the two speakers explained that the lectures were to assist the Secretaries General in their duties in all ramifications and “not only to organize the entire secretariats entrusted to them by the Bishops of their conferences. The speakers also spoke on the contentious issue of handover, a topic that generated contributions from some of the participants.

The lecturers position on this controversial issue, noted the need to eradicate or remedy the common irregularities which seem to have negative impacts on the Church. According to them, it is necessary to draft binding rules on the part of the bishops which may be in form of management manual. In their separate votes of thanks, Bishop Arstide Gonsalo and Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the training programme which, according to them has re-invigorated the participants. They noted that; “the trainers have implicitly transferred the passion to administer noticeable in them into the participants, in the lecture series”.

READ BIBLE AND SAY THE ROSARY EVERYDAY
MEMBERS OF SIGNIS CARIBBEAN MET FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members of SIGNIS Caribbean met from July 31st until August 2nd for the Annual General Meeting of SIGNIS Caribbean, which coincided with the 25th Anniversary celebration of one of its members, the Caribbean School for Catholic Communications.

Twenty members attended the Annual General Meeting, representing 8 of the 19 dioceses of the Antilles Episcopal Conference: Aruba/Curacao, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St Vincent & The Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad. The members from St Lucia and Bahamas were unable to attend. Also in attendance were the Secretary of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) and the Archbishop of Port of Spain.

The President, Lisa Bhajan, welcomed 5 new members - Fr Amelio Chi from Belize, Melvin Mackintosh from Suriname, the new General Manager, Kathryn Tardieu of Camsel (Catholic Media Services from the archdiocese of Port of Spain) and Renee Smith (Camsel's parish desk coordinator), and Lauren Branker (AEC communications).

She expressed that new membership meant that “SIGNIS Caribbean is not stagnant but constantly vibrant and growing.” The members explored ways of attracting the ‘missing’ dioceses to become part of this exciting Catholic Caribbean group for a more united approach to building communications in the region.

Over the past year, SIGNIS Caribbean followed the pattern of SIGNIS world and created a number of desks to assist in its development and activities.

Among them, the Integrated Pastoral Communications Plan Desk (IPCP) has been responsible for gathering updates from the member dioceses as SIGNIS Caribbean had been mandated by the AEC bishops to assist in creating an Integrated Pastoral Communication Plan for each diocese and to eventually design an IPCP for the entire AEC region.

In the words of the President, “It has been baby steps for many with little seeds being scattered here and there. However, others have been making good headway.”

In order to fast track the process, an e-seminar was created by the University of Dayton – “New Ways of Being Church in the Digital Milieu”. To date, 206 have participated throughout the region, including priests and bishops, and 116 persons completed the course.

In keeping with SIGNIS ALC’s direction to bring focus on “good living”, the upcoming Amazon Synod and the many issues outlined in Laudato Si’, a guest speaker was invited to present “The Caribbean Marine Situation – effects of climate change” and a member from Suriname gave an overview of the Amazonian Synod preparations.

ZAMBIA HOSTS THEOLOGIANS FROM ENGLISH-SPEAKING AFRICA

The Theological Colloquium for English-Speaking African Theologians has taken place in Lusaka, Zambia under the theme Proclamation, Sacraments and Christian Witness in the Missio Ad gentes in Africa. The Theological formation initiative was organised by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS)’s International Secretariat and the Pontifical Mission Societies National Direction in Zambia in view of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 called for by Pope Francis. The Theological Colloquium was explained as a formation initiative that represents the four dimensions of Preparing for and living the Extraordinary Mission Month of October 2019.
2019 SIGNIS AFRICA CONGRESS:
Participants advocate coordinated Strategy against Cybercrime

Delegates at the recently concluded Congress of Signis Africa, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (September 3-7), have advocated for local and regional strategy in the fight against cybercrime and improved structure and visibility of Signis at local, national and regional levels in all the countries of the continent.

This was part of the resolutions adopted by the delegates at the end of their deliberations on the various papers delivered by experts during the four-day programme. The theme of the Congress was: The African Youth in the Digital World: Promoting Creativity for Integral Development.

In the communiqué containing the resolutions and signed by Rev. FR. Professor Walter Ihejirika and Rev. Fr. Dieudonne Kofi Davor, the President and Secretary/Treasurer of the association respectively; the delegates also resolved among other things that: to harness the creativity of young people in the digital framework with media and digital literacy; promote the use of digital technology for telling our own stories and promote local best practices on the youth and digital world at the continental level.

Also, they agreed to serve as professional consultants to the Church’s hierarchy in pastoral planning for the young people in the digital age; partner with other relevant bodies/organisations who are involved in the tasks of promoting creativity and integral development of the youth in the digital world and use all the means available to facilitate the implementation of the strategic objectives and resolutions of the continental body.

Noting that Signis Africa is a stakeholder of the child/youth protection programme of the Church in the continent; the delegates noted the need for the association to make her contributions to the creation of awareness about the challenges faced by the African children and young people in the digital age. The highlighted the needs of the youths of the continent to include: education, health, job opportunities, social space, religious and cultural values.

The needs identified by the delegates in the context of the theme of the congress included: the use of members profession to accompany the youth in order to find their rightful place in the digital world and for them to apply their creativity for the common good; and harness the digital technologies to revitalize the missionary spirit and promote creativity and integral development; among others.

Addressing the delegates, the President of Signis World; Helen Osman noted that: “In a time where “fake news” has become a rallying cry and a way to suppress information which contradicts ideologies or viewpoints, it is increasingly important for us, as Catholic communicators, to model what it means to be positive and healthy citizens in the Digital Continent, as the digital media environment was described by Pope Benedict.”

She also pointed out that the Church is facing several crises, and one of them is a crisis of credibility. Her words: “This crisis of credibility is not just with young people, but with a group of people I’ve heard described as GenC: Generation Connected. Unlike the millennials or GenX, Y, or Z, Gen C is not defined by their age. Instead, this cohort is defined by being digitally connected. When they seek answers, they go to the Internet. Why ask questions, they say, when you have Alexa or Siri or Google?”

Signis Nigeria was represented at the Congress by a 15-man delegation which included the CBCN Chairman for Social Communications and the Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha Archdiocese; Most Rev. Denis Isizoh and Most Rev Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo, the Bishop of Oyo Diocese and President of CEPACS, the communication office of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).
Twelve Scholars drawn from English speaking Africa presented academic papers. Sr. Obiorah Mary Jerome of Nigeria presented a paper on, The challenge of full participation of the laity in the mission of the Church in Africa. Sr. Florence Oso, another Nigerian Theologian’s paper was on, Migration, urbanisation and mission in the city. Fr. Anthony Akinwale OP also from Nigeria, spoke about Mutuality in mission - sending and receiving. From Cameroon, two academicians made their contributions. Fr. Humphrey Tatah Mbuy presented a paper on, Pentecostalism, interreligious dialogue and the mission of the Church in Africa. Cameroonian Professor, Paul Nchoji Nkwii’s presentation focused on Anthropological challenges, Sacraments, scripture and the mission of the Church in Africa. Malawi had two presentations. Fr. George Buleya on, Social media and the Mission of the Church in Africa, while Fr. Joseph Kimu highlighted the issue of Sacraments in Africa - Missio Ad gentes. Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia had one speaker each. Dr Camillus Kassala’s presentation was on Responsible stewardship of creation. Fr. Francis Appiah Kubi of Ghana: The vocation, ministry and mission of priests and religious men and women in Church mission in Africa. Fr. Lawrence Daka SJ, a Zimbabwean, presented a paper on, The hunger for healing as a challenge to the Church’s ministry in a fast-changing Africa. Fr. Peter - John Pearson of South Africa: Corruption as a stumbling block to the mission of the Church. Then Fr. Patrick Chilambwe, Zambia spoke on, The role of Christians in public office in the mission of evangelisation in public service in Africa. To cap it all, Fr. Fabrizio Meroni, Secretary-General of the Pontifical Missionary Union, Rome also participated in the Theological Colloquium.

Participants eagerly listened to the speakers and later expressed great satisfaction at the richness of the papers presented and urged African theologians and academicians to share their knowledge with ordinary Christians regularly. The Pontifical Mission Societies says they decided to engage with African academicians in order to foster theological reflection and Missionary formation in the pastoral life of Local Churches. This is one way in which the African Church is preparing for the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 and beyond.

Members of the Catholic Women Organisation of Nigeria, Abeokuta Diocese at a function, recently.
The Holy Father Pope Francis has stated that women have “legitimate claims” to seek more justice and equality in the Catholic Church, but stopped short of endorsing more sweeping calls from his own bishops to recognize the “urgency of an inevitable change” to give them leadership roles, Associate Press has reported.

According to the report monitored in Lagos, Pope Francis issued a document inspired by an October 2018 meeting of the world’s bishops on better ministering to today’s young Catholics. The meeting was marked by demands for greater women’s rights, and the bishops’ final document called the need for women to have positions of responsibility and decision-making in the church “a duty of justice.”

In his lengthy document, “Christ is alive,” the Pope endorses no such conclusion. He says only that a church that listens to young people must be attentive to women’s “legitimate claims” for equality and justice, and must better train men and women who have leadership potential.

“A living church can look back on history and acknowledge a fair share of male authoritarianism, domination, various forms of enslavement, abuse and sexist violence,” Francis writes. “With this outlook, she can support the call to respect women’s rights, and offer convinced support for greater reciprocity between males and females, while not agreeing with everything some feminist groups propose.”

Pope Francis names new director of Holy See press office

Pope Francis recently appointed Matteo Bruni director of the Holy See Press Office, effective July 22. Bruni replaces Alessandro Gisotti, who has been serving as director ad interim after the resignations of Greg Burke and Paloma Garcia Ovejero at the end of 2018.

Bruni, 43, an Italian born in Great Britain, has worked for the Holy See press office since 2009, including as chief press handler, and most recently, as the lead on organization of papal trips.

In 2016, he became coordinator of the Media Operations section; in which he handled the accreditation of journalists for events during the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Though not a journalist, Bruni’s background includes time working with the Sant’Egidio Community, a lay Catholic movement, for which he traveled around the world coordinating charity initiatives.

Bruni speaks fluent English and has an academic background in foreign languages. He also speaks Italian, Spanish, and French.

Gisotti, who has taken part in five papal trips during his six and a half months as interim director, has been given the role of vice editorial director of the Dicastery for Communication, serving under editorial director Andrea Tornielli (named to the position in early December 2018) and Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Dicastery for Communication since July 2018.

Sergio Centofanti, a journalist for Vatican News, was also named a vice director of editorial direction for Vatican communications.

The editorial director and his new deputies will direct all of the content of the Vatican Media platform, coordinate the editorial line of Vatican communications, and oversee the integration of traditional media and digital media with attention to the universal dimension of the Holy See’s communications.
NEWS FROM THE VATICAN

Cardinal condemns receiving Communion in the Hand

The Prefect for the Congregation on Liturgy and the Sacraments, at the Vatican; Cardinal Robert Sarah has condemned in strong terms, the reception of the Blessed Sacrament in the hand, standing, during the celebration of the Holy Mass. He described the act as “lack of submission to the signs of God and lack of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament.”

The cardinal made this assertion in the preface he wrote titled “The Distribution of Communion on the hand: a historical, juridical and pastoral survey written by Don Federico Burtoli. Describing the practice, which is now common in most churches of the world; as part of Satan’s attack on the Church, Cardinal Sarah lamented this lack of reference for the Blessed Sacrament; saying it leads to belief in ‘error’ on the matter. According to him: The most diabolical attack consists in trying to extinguish faith in the Eucharist, sowing errors and favouring an unsuitable manner of receiving it,” the cardinal wrote. He continued: “Truly, the war between Michael and his Angels on one side, and Lucifer on the other, continues in the heart of the faithful: Satan’s target is the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated host. “Why do we insist on communicating standing in the hand? Why this attitude of lack of submission to the signs of God? The cardinal continued: “Receiving keeling and on the tongue is much more suited to the sacrament itself. I hope there can be a rediscovery and promotion of the beauty and pastoral value of this manner. In my own opinion and judgement, this is an important question on which the Church today must reflect. This is a further act of adoration and love that each of us can offer to Jesus Christ.”

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EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF BISHOP ADESINA IN PICTURES

Msgr. Francis Adesina, flanked by two Priests of the Ijebu-ode Diocese on the way to the Altar for the ordination ceremony.

The ordaining prelate praying for the Msgr. Adesina, with the Bible over his head, during the Episcopal ordination ceremony.

The new Bishop with members of his family.

Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Guido Filipazzi congratulating Bishop Adesina, after his episcopal Ordination and installation as the third Bishop of Ijebu-ode diocese.

Cross section of Rev. Frs. And Rev. Sisters at the ceremony.

Bishop Francis Adesina, fourth from left, in a group photograph with the Bishops at the ceremony.
2019 DIOCESAN WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY PHOTO CLIPS

AUCHI

CSN, ABUJA
The Nigeria Google Crowdsourcing Representative and Fides Google Personnel, Uchechukwu Enem, speaking to the people at a day workshop organized by the Communications Department of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi.

Group photograph of Catholic Media Practitioners, Catholic Artistes and Entertainers Association of Nigeria (CAEAN) with the Director of Communications, Makurdi Diocese, Rev. Fr. Moses Iorapuu, after the 53rd World Communications Day Celebration at Holy Ghost Parish, Makurdi on June 2nd 2019.
Archbishop Martins welcomes Catholic Lawyers for 2019 Annual General Meeting

Nigeria's Catholic Lawyers under the auspices of the National Association of Catholic Lawyers (NACL) on Tuesday August 27, 2019 converged in Lagos for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Association.

In his welcome address, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins, the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos thanked the lawyers for their commitment to service in the Lord’s vineyard using their professional calling as a background. He admonished them to remain steadfast in their practice of the Catholic faith. The Archbishop Martins was represented by Rev. Fr. Michael Omughele, the parish priest of Saint Charles Borromeo Catholic Church 1004 Estate, Archbishop Martins thanked members of the association for making Lagos the host Archdiocese of this year’s AGM and wished the members successful deliberation.

Earlier, in his opening remarks, the President of the Association, Chukwuma Ezeala, heartily welcomed members to the AGM. He thanked members for the support and prayers to the members of the executives of the association since their election in August 2018.

The Secretary of the Association Barrister Angela Odunukwe presented a detailed report of the activities of the Association in the past one year. According to her the Association has not only been able to secure an office within the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) in Abuja but was able to hold a colloquium with the president and members of the Administrative Board of the CBCN in attendance.

Highlights of the AGM included amendment of the Constitution of NACL to bring same in conformity with the guidelines and operational code adopted by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). The new constitution also makes provision for the office of third vice-president to which Rev. Fr. Okpalakunne of Onitsha Archdiocese was appointed. The AGM also ratified the election of the Provincial Secretary, Mr Stephen James from the Archdiocese of Ibadan, Barrister, Mathias Tsuwa KSJI from Bauchi Diocese as Social Secretary. Others are Obby Onyeulor from Owerri Archdiocese as Financial Secretary and Mike Utsaha from Makurdi Diocese as Publicity Secretary.

Delegates from at least twenty-nine Catholic dioceses across the country attended the meeting. Also in attendance were senior lawyers; including Senator Mike Ajaegbo, CON; immediate past President of the Association and former Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Sir Steve Adehi, SAN, Hon. Mathew Egbadon former speaker Edo State House of Assembly and Hon. Justice Edward Ogar, a former Justice of the High Court of the Gambia.
Bishop decries Gruesome Murder of Priest on Peace Mission

The Catholic Bishop of Jalingo Diocese, Most Rev. Charles Hammawa has described as very painful the circumstances that led to the death of one of the priests of the diocese, Rev. Fr. David Tanko, pointing out that he died why he was pursuing a noble cause of bringing peace among two warring communities in the area.

Bishop Hammawa made the remarks in his homily at the funeral Mass held for the late priest at the Our Lady Queen of Peace Cathedral, Jalingo, Taraba State; on September 3, 2019. Rev. Fr. David Tanko was gruesomely murdered on August 28, along Takum – Wukari road.

The Bishop declared: "What a sad and devastating manner of death indeed, and it is not easy under the circumstances to accept what has happened and to go through the ritual of bidding farewell. We are only strengthened and comforted by our Christian faith of surrendering all things to God, our faith in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting and, the virtues of love and forgiveness, even of those who hurt us and are our enemies."

Bishop Hammawa who regretted the circumstances leading to unnecessary deaths and killings in Taraba State and the country in general, as a result of constant and incessant crisis and fighting; described the late Fr David Tanko as a good man, a good priest: diligent, conscientious, hardworking, amiable and peaceful.

He continued: “He would not set out to offend anyone. He was also a prayerful and spiritual priest. He was the kind of persons Nigeria needs to come out of the quagmire and mess we are in today; persons who will serve selflessly fellow brothers and sisters without any bias. What a great loss! Though we will pray now and continuously for the repose of his gentle soul, I am convinced Fr. David is already with God in heaven and interceding for us and for the end of hostilities, violence and un-wanted killing of ourselves.”

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The Bishop disclosed that Fr. David was part of the peace efforts initiated by him to help in bringing to an end the fighting between the two ethnic groups, Tiv and Jukun; and it was in course of going on this mission that he met his untimely death, and a very gruesome manner. His words: “Fr. David had gone to Takum on this day to do a few things and with his brother priest, Fr. Joachim Lucas Vosana, they shared a lot on the way forward to bring about the end of this ugly trend of acrimony, hostilities and destruction of lives and property. It was on his return that afternoon to his Parish in Amadu he met his painful, gruesome and devastating death.

Noting that problems can and are better resolved or solved through peaceful means and dialogue and not by the use of force and killings; the Bishop stated that there is not a winner in the truest sense of the term in any war situation. According to him, the present situation in different parts of the country are; certainly disturbing, worrisome and discouraging. This include: the evils of insecurity, chauvinistic and parochial selfish interests of ethnic, religious, regional, political and nepotistic dimensions plaguing and destroying us and our land, political domination and imposition of one religion on all.

Bishop Hammawa concluded, “It is a given that misunderstandings and crises of one form or another will always show up. But they can always be resolved and settled through dialogue and peaceful means. No matter how justified our grievances may be, violence does not solve anything in the long run. Let us give peace a chance. If we do not fear man or even the dead, let us fear God who avenges and judges and pays us according to our
Role of the Domestic Family in the Church as A Family stressed

The significant role of the natural family as the bastion of the Church Family of God cannot be controverted and its natural harmony must be motivated for the benefit of the larger family of God - the Church. This position was contained in the communiqué issued by the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt, Rivers State; at the end its 30th Annual Theology Week Conference, held recently at the premises of the Institution in Port Harcourt. The theme of the conference was: Becoming Church as the Family of God in Africa: Graces, Challenges and Prospects.

The conference which featured various academic presentations related to the theme, discussed extensively on: the Church as the Family of God; Church as Family of God and the Domestic Church; Managing Diversity, Protection of the Vulnerable and the Welfare of Priests and Religious in old age.

On the issue of the Church as Family of God and the Domestic Church, the communiqué which was signed by Rev. Fr. Professor Monsignor Sylvanus I Udoidem and Rev. Fr. Dr. Charles Essien, Rector and Registrar of the Institution respectively; noted: “The natural family is the domestic church and flourishing of the Church as the Family of God depends on it to bloom. It is in the natural family that the faith and values of the church are inculcated and lived out concretely. Therefore, harmony must be preserved in the natural family.”

The statement continued: “We call for the exploration of effective communication in families to prevent conflicts and to cure any that may arise. The natural family must strive daily to reflect the proper understanding of the family since ‘Every family in heaven and on earth takes its origin from God (Eph 3:4)”.

On the Church as the Family of God; the communiqué contended: “The Church as the Family of God in Africa must express this notion of covenantal bond concretely with emphasis on care for each other, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.” It added: “We emphasise the need for solidarity, promotion of justice and peace and the common good. This is indeed an expression of the new model of ecclesiology of Pope Francis of the church as a field hospital.”

The communiqué among other things expressed concern on the mismanagement of the gift of diversity which has resulted in conflicts and therefore called for proper education for the management of these diversities for the enhancement of the Church, the Family of God. It also advocated the need for the education of the “biological family members of priests and religious for them to understand their role in supporting their children working for God in God’s vineyard and not constitute a burden of distraction to them”.

According to the decisions of the members, African Theology seeks to interpret the apostolic tradition for an audience that is primarily African; describing it as a reflection on Scripture and Tradition in the African context. They added that African theology seeks to use the good values of African religions and cultures to proclaim the love of God.

On the realization of this objective, the members of the association outlined the trends and directions. They declared: “Many hold the belief that the future of Christianity is in Africa. Yet, there are real challenges to be met: Pentecostalism, religious intolerance, the flourishing of ‘private ministries’, syncretism, poor Christian (Catholic) education and formation, migration, inadequate pastoral care, cultism and negative media influence”.

The Conference was attended by Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama (the Coadjutor Archbishop of Abuja, Apostolic Administrator of Jos Archdiocese and Chancellor of the Catholic Institute of West Africa); Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins (the Archbishop of Lagos, Pro-Chancellor and Chairman, CIWA Governing Council); Most Rev. John Okoye (Catholic Bishop of Awgu and Chairman, CBCN Committee on Theology); Most Rev Hyacinth Oroko Egbebo, MSP, the Bishop of Bomadi Diocese.

The Conference had tremendous input from Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Papal Nuncio to West Indies; Rev. Prof. Nathaniel Soede, President of the Association of African Theologians (ATA); Rev. Prof. Anthony Akinwale, OP; Sr. Prof. Teresa Okure, HSCJ; Rev. Fr. Dr. Ignatius Obinwa. In attendance were: Rev. Fr. Eworo Moses Iyara, OSA, (Secretary, Inculturation and Translation, Theology and Ethics Units, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Abuja); Rev. Prof. Hyacinth E. Ichoku (the Vice Chancellor of Veritas University, Abuja); CIWA Staff and students as well as guests from within and outside Nigeria.

The Church as the Family of God in Africa must express this notion of covenantal bond concretely with emphasis on care for each other, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.

We emphasise the need for solidarity, promotion of justice and peace and the common good. This is indeed an expression of the new model of ecclesiology of Pope Francis of the church as a field hospital.
BISHOP AVENYA ADVISES PRIESTS TO BE READY TO DIE FOR CHRIST

The Catholic Bishop of Gboko Diocese, Most Rev. William Avenya has said that one who is afraid of dying for Christ is not worthy of being a priest. The Bishop made this assertion at the ordination of seven Spiritan deacons to the Catholic priesthood at the St. John the Baptist Cathedral, Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria on Saturday, August 31, 2019.

The bishop said that they were at the Cathedral to do what God has asked us to do; “to ordain priests who will do the business of the tabernacle - to administer the word of God to his people, to serve at the altar of God and to be of service to humanity for the salvation of souls.”

Bishop Avenya reminded the candidates what the work of the priest is. According to him, the priest is to proclaim the word of God so that humanity may follow the ways of God. The priest must do so with patience and perseverance, he added. He is to persuade the people to buy into the agenda of Christ and if the people reject the message, he must dust his feet and leave the village in which he works for another village, the Bishop further stated.

Administer the sacraments to God’s people free of charge as the sacraments are not to be administered for money. “You have received freely and you must thus give freely.” The priest will thus anoint the sick and not the dead as there is no Sacrament for the dead but for the living.

Work with the people of God, that is, the priest must serve God’s people by doing, whatever is good in the community for the good and the development of the people. “You are supposed to be dedicated and committed to your work.” Give your life for the ransom of many, following in the footsteps of the one who has called you, Jesus Christ, as he gave his life for the salvation of many.

After expanding on the three essential works the priest is expected to do, Bishop Avenya stated that one who is afraid of giving his life for the sake of Christ is not worthy to be a priest. “When priests and bishops give their lives for God, they will change the world.” He added. The Bishop further stated that our Christianity does not encourage superficiality but total commitment. He therefore admonished the People of God to be serious with the work of God in order to make positive impact in life.

The Local ordinary of Gboko Diocese continued that for the priest, the church has provided him with three evangelical counsels to help him work with total dedication. The evangelical counsels are: obedience, chastity and poverty.

He however noted that sometimes, the lay people make the priest go astray as they are responsible for what we become. He however admonished the candidness for the ordination to know that it is not what people want that they should do, but what God wants.

Bishop Avenya thanked the Spiritans for training the candidates as he admitted that it is not easy to train a priest. He also thanked the parents for donating their children to the Church and reminded them that given a child to the Church is not an investment of which they would expect profit but simple donation to God for the good of humanity. He also appreciated the Spiritans who built the cathedral church over 50 years ago.

He advised the congregation thus: “The priests that will be ordained today are missionaries, if they come to you and you ask them for some things and they give you they are not doing the right thing. You must rather assist them with your resources to enable them do the work of God.”

Before the beginning of the Mass, Fr. James Akpagher, CSSp, the Provincial Superior of the Province of Nigeria North-East, thanked Bishop Avenya for accepting to ordain the seven young men in his Cathedral. Those ordained at the ceremony were: Rev. Fathers: Simon Sunday Aberagi, CSSp, Baka Mlamga Benedict, CSSp, Edeba John Edoka, CSSp, James Ameh Elaigwu, CSSp, Fidelis Jimeshio, CSSp, Oche Paul Sunday Andrew, CSSp and Yaga Paul Iorfa, CSSp.

**Story by Kuha INDYER, CSSp**
BISHOP ADOBOH BURRIES MOTHER

The mother of the Catholic Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese, Mrs. Sarah Adoboh was recently laid to rest, after a funeral Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Tse-Kucha, the home parish of Bishop Peter Adoboh, the son of the deceased.

Also present at the ceremony were: Bishops: Michael Apochi of Otukpo Diocese; Matthew Audu of Lafia Diocese; many priests, religious, lay faithful and dignitaries from all walks of life, from different parts of the country.

In his homily at the funeral Mass, Bishop Matthew Audu noted that those who die in the Lord are blessed; adding that the death of Mama Sarah is not only a loss to the family and friends, but to all who had knew her. According to the bishop: “It is difficult to understand when death strikes. We understand it when it touches someone we love. It can be a shattering experience if not for our Christian faith that consoles us and we must fall on it.” Bishop Audu noted that Mama Sarah, who died at the age of 84 had left good memories, hospitable and beautiful.

He further stated that “The frequency of death should make us sit back and prepare for eternity. This place is not our true and final destination. Ask yourself, if you were to die this night would you ask for more time to go and reconcile? Now is the best time. Go and settle the imbalance. We shall be judged concerning how we treat Christ in others.”

Speaking at the ceremony, Bishop Peter Adoboh expressed gratitude to all those who had come to give his mother a befitting burial. Special mention was made of the bishops in attendance, pastors from other churches, government delegation, traditional leaders, the laity, his classmates at different levels and the media.

BISHOP URGES NEW DEACON TO BE A POSITIVE INSTRUMENT OF CHRIST

The Catholic Bishop of Warri Diocese, Most Rev. John Oke Afareha has charged Rev. Michael Oyibo, a newly ordained deacon for the diocese to be a positive instrument of Jesus Christ through his service to the Church which he is ordained for. The ceremony took place at the Sacred Heart Catholic Cathedral, Warri, Delta State.

Urging the newly ordained deacon to be ready to serve and be a positive instrument of Jesus Christ through his service to the Church, Bishop Afareha told him that as a deacon, he is called to serve and not to be served; adding: “You must use your time positively, and you must be dedicated to the service of God, His people and hold tenaciously only to the teachings and the doctrines of the Catholic Church in which you are called to serve.”

The Bishop urged Deacon Oyibo to be ready to assist the priest in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, wherever he is assigned to work as it is his duty to serve the people of God. Speaking on the qualities of a deacon as recorded in the Scripture, Bishop Afareha enjoined him to be of good character and not a man of double standard. He advised him to be blameless in the course of his ministry to God’s people and be a man of prayer who will hold unto the book of prayers, and firmly prepare for the liturgy of the word as he cannot do without the word of God.
ORDINATION CEREMONY OF NEW PRIESTS FOR SOKOTO DIOCESE

The five Deacons about to be ordained Priests for Sokoto Diocese by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah.

Bishop Kukah performing the ordination rites on the five Deacons.

Bishop Kukah performing the ordination rites on the five Deacons.

Bishop Kukah (5th from left), in a group photograph with the new Priests.

Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah and Rev. Dacholom Datiri met the Prime Minister of Hungary, H. E. Viktor Orban; when they visited the country, this year. During the visit, the Bishop and their host prayed together (above); and after a brief deliberation, gifts were exchanged (pictures below).

The Priests responding to the greetings of the congregation after their ordination.

The Priests responding to the greetings of the congregation after their ordination.
The Chairman, Executive members and entire Faithful of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abeokuta rejoice with our amiable and invaluable Bishop, Most Rev. Peter Odetoynbo on the hosting of the 2019 Second Plenary Meeting of the:

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA (CBCN)

Also, we warmly welcome the President of the Conference, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops from all over the country to the land of the historic Olumo Rock for your meeting (September 11 - 20, 2019) holding at the Divine Mercy Pastoral Centre, Abeokuta, Ogun State.

We thank you for being the voice of the voiceless in our country and pray that God will continue to bless, protect and give you the wisdom and discernment to continue to serve the common good of humanity to the greater glory of God.

We wish you fruitful deliberations and journey mercy as you return to your Archdioceses and Dioceses at the end of your Plenary.

Welcome!

Nnor!

Sannu Da zuwa!

Ekabo!!

Mr. Vincent Akintola Akande
President

Mrs. Agnes Kemisola Emuoso
General Secretary
PICTORIAL COVERAGE OF SIGNIS AFRICA CONGRESS IN ETHIOPIA

Celebration of the opening Mass before the commencement of the Congress.

Bishop Denis Isizoh, CBCN Episcopal Chairman for Social Communications making an intervention at the Congress.

Group photograph of the delegates at the Congress.

Signis World President, Helen Osman addressing the delegates.

The Nigerian delegation at the Congress. (4th from left is Bishop Denis Isizoh, CBCN Episcopal Chairman for Social Communications.)
THE NINE NEW PRIESTS FOR ONITSHA ARCHDIOCESE

Before the ordination

Responding to the joy of the congregation after their ordination.

In a group photograph with Archbishop Valerian Okeke and all the Priests at the ceremony
Some children carrying the Nigerian flag to welcome the Nigerian Delegation to Uganda.

Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo Diocese (centre) with two Bishops of the Oriental Church.

Members of the Standing Committee of SECAM after the assembly and Golden Jubilee celebration.

Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese and Bishop Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo of Oyo Diocese in front of the statue of St Andrew Kaggwa, one of the Ugandan Martyrs.

Cross section of Priests at the celebration of the opening Mass.

Bishops of RECOWA/CERAO who attended the SECAM Assembly and Golden Jubilee at the Speke Resort at Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda.
The celebrant, Rev. Fr. Paul Ubebe OVM, in a group photograph with Priests who concelebrated the birthday thanksgiving Mass with him.

The celebrant (right) being helped by Rev. Fr. Patrick Alumuku (Centre) to read the Papal message during the celebration of the thanksgiving Mass.

The celebrant (4th from left), with Priests and Religious cutting the birthday anniversary cake.

Rev. Fr. Paul Ubebe in the midst of youths after the celebration of

The celebrant with school child after the celebration of the Mass.

The celebrant with some Lay Faithfuls who attended the thanksgiving Mass.
CELEBRATION

Rev. Fr. ANTHONY IJASAN’S 50th BIRTHDAY

CELEBRATION IN PICTURES

The celebrant, Rev. Fr. Anthony Ijasan in a procession with Bishop Felix Ajakaiye into the Church for the celebration of the birthday thanksgiving Mass.

Archbishop Felix Ajakaiye addressing the congregation.

The celebrant flanked by two members of his family.

The celebrant being congratulated by one of his friends.

The celebrant dancing at the reception after the celebration of the Mass.

The celebrant cutting the birthday cake.
CSN PLATFORM

REV. FR. AJANA’S GOLDEN JUBILEE BIRTHDAY IN PICTURES

The celebrant, Rev. Fr. Ajana

Rev. Fr. Ajana being led to the Altar by the children of the Orphanage of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy, Bwari, Abuja; for the celebration of the Mass

Rev. Fr. Ajana advising the children to persevere in whatsoever circumstances they find themselves and put their hope in God

As part of the activities for the birthday celebration, Caritas Catholic Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN) organised a one-day free health treatment for people living in Durumi area in Abuja

Rev. Fr. Ajana surrounded by Rev. Srs, Rev. Frs and other friends cutting the birthday cake
CSN PLATFORM

Photo clips of Archbishop Martins 68th Birthday
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ABEOKUTA

The President, Executive and entire members of;
CATHOLIC WOMEN ORGANISATION OF NIGERIA (CWON), Abeokuta Diocese heartily welcome our spiritual fathers to the ancient city of Abeokuta for the second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic

The

for the Second Plenary Meeting of

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA (CBCN)

Holding at Divine Mercy Pastoral Centre, Abeokuta from September 11 to 20, 2019. We rejoice with our indefatigable Father in the Lord, Most Rev. Peter Kayode Adetoyinbo on this unique and historic hosting of all the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria.

We wish you God’s blessings and successful deliberations as you continue to lead and guide the flock of Christ through the challenges of time in our country Nigeria.

Ad Multos Annos

Welcome!

Nnor!

Sanna Da zuwa!

Ekabo!!

Mrs. Grace Omani
President

Mrs. Nnadi Patience
General Secretary