

THE CATHOLIC

AMBASSADOR



Vol. 27

No 1

December 2009



The Second Synod For Africa

Do you know?

That the present edition of the magazine in your hands vol. 27 No 1 completes the quarterly circle for this year and the first of its kind in a long while?

That nonchalance on the part of many Associate Members in renewing their subscriptions is making it increasingly difficult for the magazine to survive?

That failure of Associate members to recruit new subscribers (at least 5 yearly) negates one of the basic conditions of their membership?

That the failure of many MSP priests to introduce the magazine in their parishes and actively promote it means that their parishioners cannot support the Missionary Society that nurtured and groomed these missionaries?

That some priests even when they receive the magazines throw them in an untidy corner in their sacristy where they gather dust and are eventually thrashed?

That it is not enough to complain about the quality of the magazine whether in its editorial content or production quality when you are not prepared to make any inputs to see to its improvement?

That the magazine, whether we like it or not, remains a vital link between the Missionary Society of St Paul and her collaborators throughout the world?

That no missionary society worth its name has ever gathered sufficient goodwill in the absence of a mission magazine such as *The Catholic Ambassador*?

Now that you know all these and perhaps even more, **DON'T JUST IGNORE US.** Write to us about the articles in every edition, those that annoy you, those that gladden you. Get a new subscriber today. Send us a gift to encourage us. **Remember, we are all in this together.**

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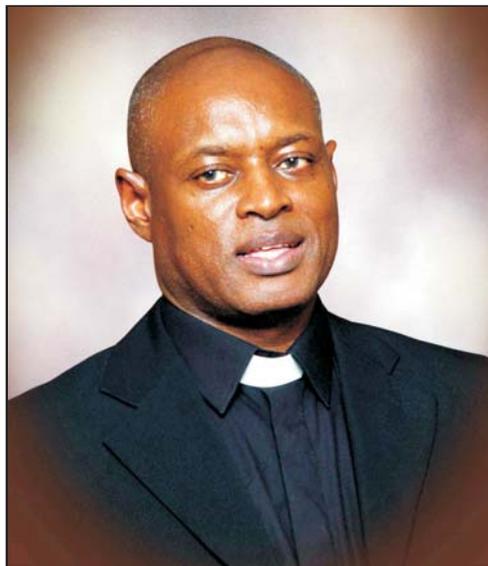
By post: The Editor, The Catholic Ambassador, P.M.B 2011, Iperu-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

The peace of Christmas

*Unto us a Child is born, a Son is given.
He is called Mighty God and Prince of Peace (cf. Isaiah 9:5-6)*

Once again I write to you all our Associates, Friends and readers as we approach this Holy season of Christmas. Everything in nature reminds us that it is Christmas time. The flowers have shed their leaves in order to bring up new, fresh leaves and beautiful colours. The harmattan breeze in its own way tells that the year is almost ended. No one is left out in the beauty and hope that Christmas brings. This much is captured and expressed in this hymn, "Christmas comes to bless the earth, with its wondrous heavenly birth, bright and high the dawning light, burning through the gloom of night".

The daily liturgy of the Church is a foretaste of that heavenly birth when all things will be made new and peace restored to both man and nature. In other words, the Church in her everyday prayers anticipates with eager longing the coming of the Lord. At each Mass, after the Lord's Prayer, the priest articulates the hopes of the worshipping community in these words "Deliver us Lord, from every evil and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ." This prayer assumes special importance and meaning in the seasons of Advent and Christmas because during these seasons we celebrate the coming of God among as man in the person of Jesus Christ who is our hope and peace. In him, God comes in search of us, taking the first initiative in order to bring us peace by putting to an end all that divides us and makes us unhappy.



**Very Rev. Anselm Umoren, MSP
Superior General**

Peace is the first and basic requisite for any human progress for without it; no meaningful development can take place. It is much more than the mere absence of wars and conflicts. Peace is the totality of human well-being. The Hebrew word, shalom captures this sentiment of integral well-being in a manner that is much deeper in English. Peace understood as shalom, conveys a sense of harmony both physical and spiritual. It is harmony between human beings and nature, that is, being at home in the universe. It portrays both harmony and goodwill being man and neighbour. In other words, it is a community at peace with itself where everyone is both a neighbour and a friend. Shalom means walking in humble fellowship with our God whose presence is not threatening but inviting, and who opens up new vistas

for us, gently exhorting us to make a leap in faith with childlike trust and hope to discover the yet uncharted routes. It is simply wholeness lived in keeping with God's injunctions. This is the peace proclaimed at the birth of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, "Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace to people of goodwill" (Lk. 2:14). The peace which is the Saviour's gift is the greatest good.

The peace which is given to us at Christmas is both a gift and a task. It is given that we may share it with our families, friends, neighbours and the society at large. As we commemorate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas, let us ask him to give us his peace always. And may that peace well-up within us so as to set all of us free from all that troubles us. Whatever may upset our peace, we know that we are not alone for HE IS OUR PEACE!

Merry Christmas to each and all!

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1980 - 1991 (d. 2009)

First MSP Editor

Fr Joseph Otoide, MSP,

1991 - 1995 (d. 1995)

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Cover

*Opening Mass of the Second African Synod
in St. Peter's Basilica. Courtesy:
L'Osservatore Romano*

Do they know its Christmas?

So soon, it seems, the year rolls to its inevitable end. As the harmattan winds gathers its dust and the trees shed their leaves, the fragrance of celebration fills the air. Yuletide has a frenzy all its own which is inimitable. A child is born giving expression to new beginnings, new possibilities, new hopes, and new aspirations. *Unto us a Child is born!* Few things compare to the mystery of a new born child. Its innocence, the sheer element of surprise simply overwhelms us, that momentarily at least, we lay aside our cares and burdens and savor the moment of pure joy. Jesus is born into our world, our hearts. Christmas is about God's unfathomable love, his never ending desire for the happiness and well being of mankind. Thankful to God for the passing of an old year we look forward with hope to the New Year. Fr. Peter Schineller, SJ, in his reflection in this edition has a simple advice for all of us this Christmas. It is to **STOP, LOOK, LISTEN.**

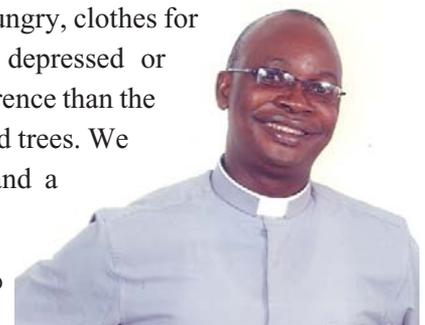
Sadly, this Christmas would be celebrated without one of our priests who has gone before us marked with the sign of faith. Fr. Basil Aguinam, MSP passed away peacefully in his sleep on the night of October 22 in the MSP community house, Iperu Ogun State, Nigeria. Fr. Basil had been ill for sometime. He was laid to rest at the MSP cemetery in Gwagwalada on November 10, 2009. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace. Like one searching for a lost treasure, we go to seek out the famous Golden Book of Associate Members. The fruits of our search will amaze many Associate members who perhaps have heard but never seen the Book. The contents of this book call everyone to action and responsibility.

In this edition too, we conclude the interview with award winning writer, Fr. Uwem Akpan, SJ. You will find his views on the need for a unique African spirituality riveting. The Second Synod for Africa has come and gone, but the memory lingers. Some of these memories we bring to you in exclusive pictures.

There are many other interesting articles for the reader's enjoyment. This edition is the fourth for this year thereby completing the quarterly circle. We are grateful to our numerous readers and subscribers whose interest and feedback continue to encourage us.

Dear friends let us not just allow this Christmas to pass by without sparing a thought for the less fortunate ones among us. Let them know its Christmas. It is a season of love and joy. Let us spread this love and joy by acts of good deeds. A visit to the sick, a meal for the hungry, clothes for the naked, a word of comfort to the depressed or imprisoned will make a whole lot of difference than the endless investment in Christmas lights and trees. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a spirit filled and prosperous New Year.

P. Ebito Akekpe, msp
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Missionary Society of St Paul

Gwagwalada, Abuja & Iperu-Remo, Ogun State.

Admissions 2011

Requirements:

Age: 17-25 years (Graduates, NCE holders, etc. may be older)

Academic Qualifications: Minimum of 5 credits, including English, in GCE/SSCE

Testimonials: From parish priest, principals of schools/employers

Personal Qualities: Strong faith, love of Jesus Christ, love of people and Good health.

Handwritten Application should be sent between November & December to:

The Revd Vocations Director

Missionary Society of St Paul

P. M. B. 2011, Iperu-Remo 121003, Ogun State.

E-mail: mppvocations@yahoo.com Website: www.mspfathers.org

Motto: "We are Ambassadors for Christ".

Please enclose stamped self addressed envelope for reply

Vocations Director
08029968777

For reasons of cost and personnel, MSP only admits candidates
resident in Nigeria to its seminary

Letters to the Editor

I join you and the entire Catholic Church in Nigeria to commiserate with the St Patrick's Society and the family of Fr. Jim Sheerin, SPS, who passed away recently. Though I never met this man, I have read so much about him courtesy of The Catholic Ambassador magazine. I am inspired by all I have heard about him. We look forward to more published works of this saintly priest who has gone to meet the One who shapes destiny.

**Timothy-Maria Musa
Abaji, Nigeria**

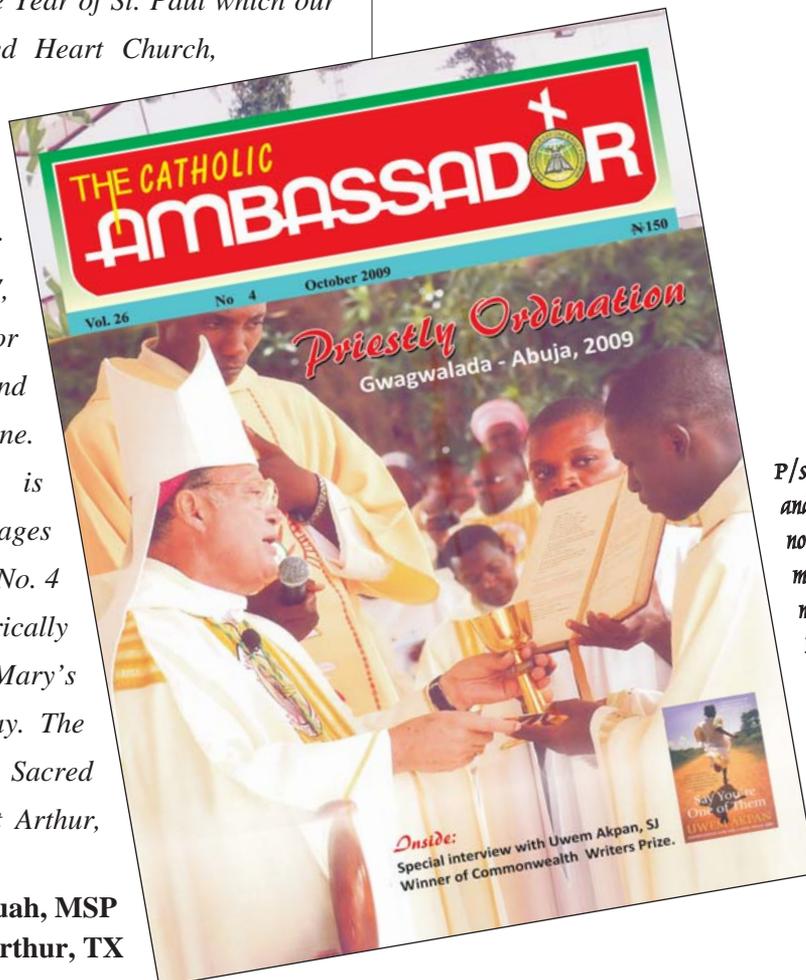
I have always enjoyed reading The Catholic Ambassador and wherever I go to I try to make my parishioners know about it. My present parishioners have also fallen in love with it. Thank you for your visit and covering the celebration of the End of the Year of St. Paul which our three MSP Parishes Sacred Heart Church, Raywood; St. Therese Church, Orange; and my Parish Sacred Heart - St. Mary Parish, Port Arthur held in my Parish on June 27, 2009. Thank you for addressing the gathering and featuring us in your magazine. The name of my Parish is incorrectly presented on pages 11, 16 & 20 of your Vol. 26 No. 4 October 2009. Historically speaking, there is no St. Mary's Parish in Port Arthur today. The name of my parish is Sacred Heart-St Mary Parish, Port Arthur, Texas.

**Fr. Charles Atuah, MSP
Port Arthur, TX**

As I read through the pages of the magazine, I found all the articles very inspiring and nourishing. The pictures and prints were of good quality. I wish to thank you and all your contributors for a job well done. Special thanks also for the major role of creating awareness of the many Priestly/Religious congregations in Nigeria through your magazine. You have assisted a lot of people in discerning their vocation.

I wish to congratulate your congregation, the Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria for the rich harvest of priestly ordination this year. As the church celebrates the year for Priests, it is my sincere prayers that the life of the priest will be that of gratitude to God.

**Sr. Callista Ahachi, SHCJ
Lagos**



P/s Unsolicited articles, reports, and photographs are welcome, but not returnable. Comments about materials published in the magazine are also welcome. Letters to the Editor should be brief. They may be edited for clarity and space. All comments and suggestions must always be made in WRITING.

Praying with Scripture 3

By Fr. Martin Eke, MSP

The only way to make God's Word one's own is to fall in love with it, read it, know it and possess it until one becomes impregnated by it. Signs of this impregnation is when one, in addition to just having a copy or copies of the Bible, loves reading it, praying with it, and letting it pray in oneself, and when one relies on it for enlightenment and guidance.

How to read the Scriptures

To cultivate the virtue of reading the Bible demands the spiritual disposition of desire, decision, commitment and discipline. It is not how much one reads, but how much one reads prayerfully, with a disposition of openness to the promptings and the help of God's Spirit.

- ❖ One can decide to read the books of the Bible randomly for thirty minutes or more daily.
- ❖ One can decide to systematically read one book after another for thirty minutes or more daily.
- ❖ One can decide to read two, or three, or more chapters of the Bible daily.
- ❖ One can decide to read the Bible by following the readings of daily and Sunday Masses. One can then decide to read up the rest of the chapters and verses of the book of the Bibles from which the readings of the Masses were selected. Following the Church's liturgical calendar, within three years one may be able to go through the entire Bible!
- ❖ One can decide to join prayer groups in parishes that organize Bible studies and classes and encourage Bible reading.
- ❖ One can decide to pray one or two or more Psalms daily.

The wonderful effect of habitual reading of the Bible is that, with time, one becomes conversant with several parts of the Bible and, without much effort, various themes of the Bible come to one's mind for prayer and at prayer.

Conclusion: "Take Up and Read"

This write-up does not exhaust the richness of praying with the Scriptures; rather, I have only attempted to bring

to our awareness the essence of this way of prayer. It is my hope that this write-up will give some insight that will enable us to explore more deeply this method of prayer.

May I conclude by recalling St Augustine's experience, which he recorded in his book *The Confessions of St Augustine*.

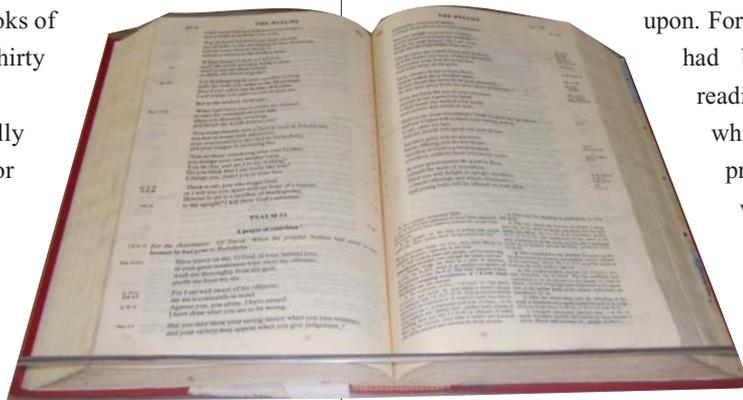
And lo, I heard from a nearby house, a voice like that of a boy or girl, I know not which, chanting and repeating over and over, "Take up and read. Take up and read." Instantly, with altered countenance, I began to think most intently whether children made use of any such chant in some kind of game, but I could not recall hearing it anywhere. ... I interpreted this solely as a command given to me by God to open the book and read the first chapter I should come

upon. For I had heard how Anthony had been admonished by a reading from the Gospel at which he chanced to be present, as if the words read were addressed to him: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me," and that

by such a portent he immediately converted to you.

So I hurried back ... snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscence" [Rm 13: 13-14]. ... Instantly, in truth at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away (Book 8, no. 29)

The Scripture text read by St. Augustine ignited the turning point in his life. The words of Jer 15:16 became fulfilled in Augustine's life, "When your words came, I devoured them: your word was my delight and the joy of my heart."



The Golden Book of Associate Members

By Patrick E. Akekpe, MSP



The theme of the 2010 Ambassador Calendar is “Our Partners in Mission-Celebrating the Associate Missionaries of St Paul”. Those who already have a copy of the calendar would discover that Associate members from different sections and zones throughout the country and beyond are showcased. On at least five months of the calendar there is a quotation from a document The Golden Book of Associate Members.

What is this Golden Book of Associate Members? Does it still exist? Who is in possession of it right now? My search for answers to these questions led me to the Promotions office. The staff there told me that they had never seen a book like that. Digging into the archives of the Catholic Ambassador magazine, I found out that the idea of this Golden Book was first mooted in Vol. 5 No 1. This was the year 1984 when Fr. Jim Sheerin, SPS first conceived the idea of having a group of lay Nigerian Catholics whose duty would be to support the fledging

Missionary Society of St. Paul. He reasoned that such individuals would have their names inscribed in a Golden Book to reflect their membership. This was well before the computer became a common feature in many offices. The Golden Book was launched on January 28, 1984. In his address during the ceremony, Bishop Anthony Sanusi then bishop of Ijebu-Ode diocese said: Here is the Golden Book in which all the names of Associate Members will be inscribed. This is the beautiful certificate for those who fulfill the five conditions of membership. The book is a book of working, not honorary missionaries; the certificate is for active apostles. I am happy to launch this Golden Book of Associate membership of the Missionary Society of St. Paul. It will be a leaven of missionary prayer and action in the Catholic Church in Nigeria. I invite all practicing Christians to seize the privilege of becoming members. I believe this Golden Book is somewhere. It is an archival material. Whoever reads this and has an idea of where this book may be found would be

doing our collective memories a great act of justice by bringing it to our attention. Subsequently, a filing system was created at that time to take care of membership. A few years later when the office was computerized all information regarding old and new associate members could now be accessed within seconds.

But the real fruits of my search for the Golden Book were that I discovered what the intentions of the original initiator of Associate members were. In a one page advertorial in the same Vol. 5 No 1, the conditions of membership were itemized. I was unpleasantly surprised that these conditions were not reflected in the Constitutions and Prayer Book for the Associate Missionaries of St Paul. I believe these conditions should be framed and walled by any serious Associate Member. According to the conditions of membership, all Associate Missionaries of St. Paul Promise:

- ❖ To share their Christian Faith by the example and goodness of their own lives.
- ❖ To make the Eucharist the centre of their own spiritual lives and offer daily prayers that others may become part of the Eucharistic Community.
- ❖ To be active members of their own parish and work zealously and in harmony with the parish priest and community leaders for the growth of the parish.
- ❖ To take a special interest in the missionary work of the Church and make themselves well informed about the Church outside their own diocese and country.
- ❖ To be partners in the work of the National Missionary Seminary of St Paul and the Missionary Society of St. Paul through:

- (a) Daily prayer: either a decade of the Rosary or a chapter of the New Testament prayerfully read;
- (b) Finding 5 subscribers to the AMBASSADOR magazine, i.e finding five people who through you will pay their first N3.00 (now N1000.00) subscription. You will remind them each year to send the subscription to our office when it is due;
- (c) Making an annual contribution of at least N10.00 (now N1000.00) towards the general maintenance of the missionary seminary;
- (d) Sharing in all the good works of the Society, in the daily prayer for benefactors and the special Mass which is said for all benefactors living and deceased on 1st Friday of every month.

Many Associate members reading this may find it like a breath of fresh air and be encouraged to give fresh zeal to their commitments. The results will be immediately obvious. Readership of the magazine will increase. If just 2000 associate members took it upon themselves to get five subscribers yearly for the magazine we would have an average of 10, 000 new subscribers every year. This would translate into 40,000 copies yearly! Right now in spite of the 'large numbers' of Associate Members, some figures suggest 10,000 and above; the average edition of each magazine is about 4,000 which adds up to 16,000 copies yearly. There is no space to go into other benefits of Associate members living up to these conditions set out by the founding fathers. There is indeed a Golden Book of Associate members. It does not matter whether this book is found or not. Let it be noted that any Associate member who as much fulfils the conditions stated above should be proud in the knowledge that his or her name will be entered in the eternal Book of Life.

APPRECIATION

For the successful celebration of my golden sacerdotal jubilee in the Sacred Heart Cathedral Calabar on Friday, July 31st 2009 and in Christ the King Cathedral Uyo, on Sunday August 2, 2009 respectively. I sincerely thank the most reverend ordinaries of the Archdiocese of Calabar and Uyo diocese, the priests, the religious and laity of the two places concerned for their generous support, donations in cash and kind. May the Lord reward all of you abundantly I am indeed very appreciative.

Monsignor Godwin P. Akpan, MSP

MSP holds Orientation for new Missionaries

Anthony Columba Ekanem, MSP

With the end of the Year of St. Paul and now Year of the Priests, not only were we blessed with 12 young men ordained Missionary priests but also invited to come in for an Orientation program before they were sent out on their *first missionary work*. With them, were others who had just completed their *one - year pastoral experience within country* and others to be sent to mission outside African Continent. In short, they were 33 participants in number including 2 priests from Idah diocese who participated in the program.

Our (one week) program this year took another approach whereby others who have been in mission came in to share and also listen to the concerns and advise from the Superior General. He kept them abreast with the concerns and demands of the 21st century apostolate. The whole idea of *'go where you are sent with alacrity'* is fair and fine. But it also requires the evangelical counsel and knowing the mind of the one who sends you. And as such, areas like sexual conduct and policy were important area to visit, pastoral availability, and prudence in our relationships, health Issues, dress code, MSP & AMSP apostolate and good relationship etc were thoroughly dealt with.

Should the mission become tougher than expected, remember Jesus' attitude and the cross that you are given. At the end of the Mass of the Holy Spirit, led by the Superior General, *Very Reverend Fr.*

Anselm Umoren, MSP, those who were in attendance could hear the echo of that beautiful psalm, *'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news'* Once again thanks to the speakers, Councilors and other brothers who took off time from their vacation to come and share with our MSP brothers before they were sent out. I truly believe by now some may have reported at the various missions with their appointment letter to begin work. As we pray for them, I appeal to you brother priests to please take time and *learn first before you teach. For others, let us know what could be done for those who suffer- burn out in the mission.*

Remember: 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few...'
Good luck and God bless.

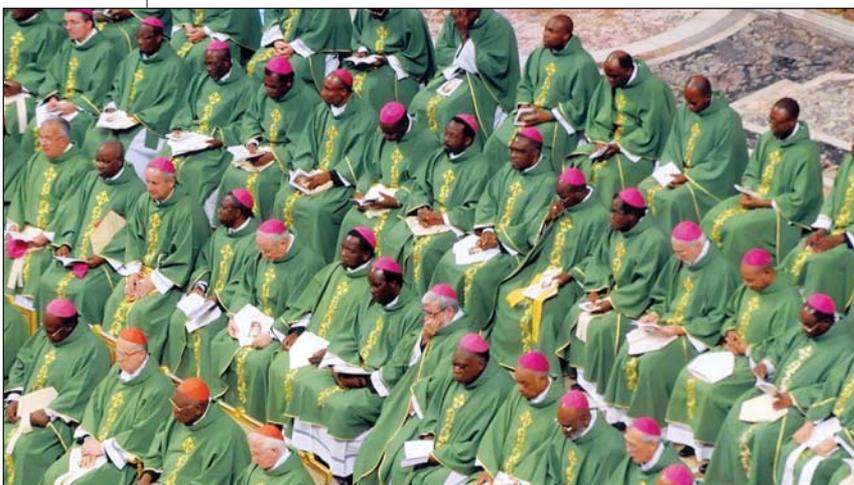


Participants at the orientation in a group photo with the Superior General

African Synod Ends

The Second Synod for Africa which kicked off in Rome on October 4, 2009 finally came to an end on October 25. Its theme was: *The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world: (Mt 5: 13, 14).* During the final Mass the pope spoke to Africa saying: "Courage! Get up, African continent". The pope said that globalization should be regulated in order to include all nations and not just the developed ones. He argued that globalization was not governed by forces that are outside the human will and can be adjusted by people. Reconciliation he added was necessary to ensure a just peace in Africa. He called on African peoples irrespective of ethnic, religious, language, cultural or social background to contribute to the growth of their continent. He praised the work of missionaries as one that is both respectful of local cultures and essential to help Africa out of hunger and disease. During the three weeks assembly the

300 bishops examined pressing issues such as AIDS and political corruption in the continent. Their parting words were directed at corrupt Catholic political leaders in Africa whom the bishops urged to either repent or quit political office and stop destroying their societies. In one of their final recommendations the bishops called for a renewed effort in the dialogue with followers of Islam and African Traditional religions.



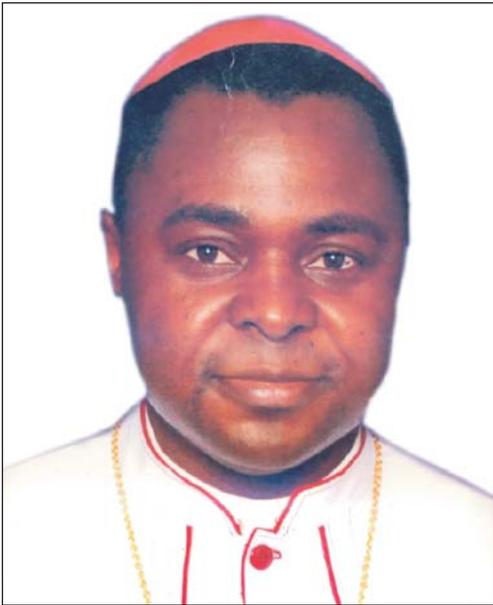
A group of Bishops at the Synod. Courtesy- L'Osservatore Romano

Bishop Anthony Adaji Installed

By Áya-mngër Tërwise

On a wet Saturday morning of September 19, Bishop Anthony Ademu Adaji, MSP was installed in the *cathedral* of St Boniface as the second Bishop of Idah Catholic Diocese. St. Boniface according to records is an old cathedral that was dedicated around 1954 then under the Lokoja mission overseen by the missionaries. Bishop Adaji is the second Bishop of the

Idah diocese and the first indigenous Bishop. The presiding Archbishop Most Revd John Onaiyekan, having asked for and listened to the Apostolic Bull then installed the new bishop



witnessed by the Papal Nuncio, the bishops and clergy and the lay faithful. All the bishops present congratulated him, the clergy and religious of the diocese, missionaries and priests of other dioceses working within his jurisdiction paid their allegiance to the new bishop in a solemn but symbolic gesture.

Archbishop Onaiyekan in his homily, acknowledged the fact that the transition of power from the late Bishop Obot to Bishop Adaji was an “ecclesiastic due process” free of hitches in a country where transfer of power has become problematic and aggressive. He regretted that Bishop Obot, who had already made a decision to step aside and hand over the reign before the Lord called Him, would have loved to witness a day like this having worked tirelessly since Idah diocese was carved out of Lokoja. He commended the choice texts selected by the new bishop as they stated his vision for the diocese, praying the Lord to give him the “wisdom to know what to say, courage to say it clearly, and the prudence to say it perfectly.” He

congratulated the Missionary society of St. Paul to whom he is the Ordinary, and lightly acknowledged that the first MSP Bishop is from his own province.

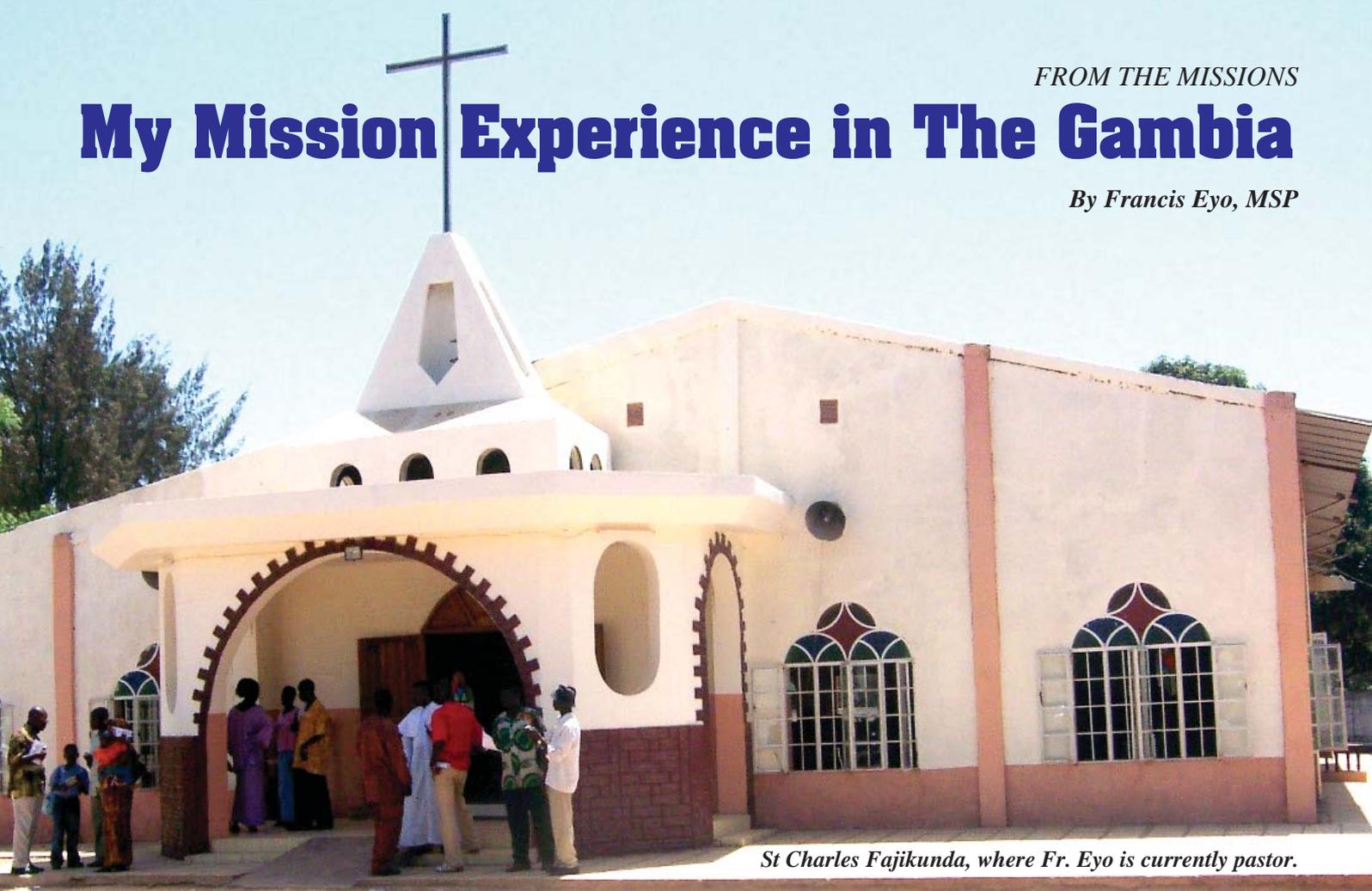
In his remarks, Bishop Adaji thanked those who made the day a success, the Late Bishop Ephraim Obot, laid to rest there on the Altar of St. Boniface for leaving his home in Akwa Ibom and making his home among the Igala and Bassa people as their chief shepherd. He thanked the Obot family and the people of Ikot Ekpene. He challenged the government of Kogi state to complement his prayers and be people oriented, alleviate the poverty of the people beginning with simple gestures like construction of roads to enable free movement of people and goods. He thanked Cardinal Okogie, all the bishops present, Archbishop Onaiyekan for cutting his trip abroad to perform the installation and the Nuncio Archbishop Renzo Fratini, for choosing the ceremony as his last public function in Nigeria. He challenged the priests of the diocese to be missionary at heart; good catechists, religious instructors to the young and flexible to work perfectly both in the urban and rural missions. He urged the clergy, religious and faithful of Idah to hold unto Christ alone, because “*someday the ministry of the Bishop comes to an end, and Christ alone endures. There is no need to be afraid.*”

Bishops present included the Nuncio, who announced his transfer to Spain and thanked the people of Nigeria. Also present were Archbishop Onaiyekan (Abuja), Makozi (emeritus of Port Harcourt), Atule Usu (Makurdi), Ajakaye (Ekiti co-adjutor), Badejo (Oyo co-adjutor), Egbebo MSP (Bomadi), Ayo-Maria Atoyebi (Ilorin), Bagobiri (Kafanchan), Uzoukwu (Minna), Aya (Ogoja), Affareha (Warri auxiliary), Duniya (Auchi). The MSP delegation was led by the Vicar General of the Society Very Revd Fr Paul Ofoha, MSP in company of other councilors and priests of the Society.

One can only but identify with Archbishop Onaiyekan in his prayer for Bishop Adaji - “*Your decision to be a missionary has turned around to be sent to your own people, may you be a prophet with honour even among your own people.*” Amen!

My Mission Experience in The Gambia

By Francis Eyo, MSP



St Charles Fajikunda, where Fr. Eyo is currently pastor.

The Missionaries of St. Paul have been working in the Gambia since 1991 and have contributed immensely towards the growth of the Catholic faith and the general well being of the people. I was sent to exercise the missionary mandate of the Church among the people of God in The Gambia. We were two MSP priests that came to the country on October 6th 2004, on our first missionary journey outside Nigeria. My missionary journey so far in The Gambia has been marked by lots of experience and some of them are quite unique. Quite remarkable is the fact that I have series of persecution experiences that actually fulfilled the gospel demand of the early Church as Jesus put it: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

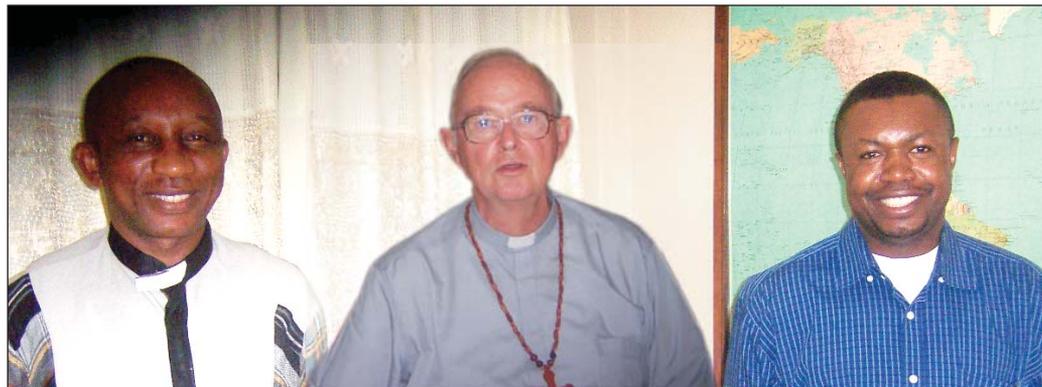
The Church has a single diocese (Banjul diocese). There are seventeen parishes. The diocese is coextensive with the size of the Country. There are seventeen local clergy, two male Religious congregations of Priests, the Spiritans and Missionaries of St. Paul of Nigeria. There are also a few international female Religious Congregations working in the diocese. My first assignment was in the Parish of the Resurrection at Brikama, in the Western Region of The Gambia. This Parish has 30 sub-stations that cover a wide range of areas. Our Church community in Brikama was quite

small amidst the huge Muslim population. The security report of the state considers Brikama a volatile area, because some Muslims here are really aggressive and accept no compromise in their relationship with others, especially, the minority Christians, who they see as alien. As a Church we had made lots of effort to reach out to our Muslim friends but it has never really been easy. We always get in return evil for good, fire for peace. Sometimes the Muslims hostility forced some of our Christians to abandon their faith and embrace Islam or become indifferent to their faith. I enjoyed my ministry to the people of Brikama. I took Jesus Christ to the youth on the streets, the women in the farms and market, the men at bantaba (men's square for petty talk) and the children in their playing squares. The parish Church was filled with many people during Sunday Masses. The parish feast day and other youth programmes attracted other Christians, Muslims and even animists from the rural stations. The parish played host to HIV / AIDS awareness and support program in partnership with YMCA and National Aids Secretariat and the Diocesan Aids Project.

The most talked about cordial relationship between Christians and Muslims in the Gambia was put to test when some members of the Muslim Community in Brikama began to witness the influx of many Brikama

youths in Church or Christian programs and the progress our parish Church was making in area of evangelization. Then bitter persecution broke out. The surroundings of the Church compound were seized by Brikama traders and vendors. Stalls and shops were erected up to the gate and entrance of the Church. On Sundays vendors took over the Church premises, while nearby recording shops blast the air with loud music that made Sunday worship difficult for us. Then the final straw was the building of a Mosque in Brikama Police Station just next door to the Church in late 2006. Majority of Muslims left the Central Mosque in the interior part of Brikama for the small police station mosque which could hardly contain them. Consequently, the Muslims Friday prayer extended gradually to the Church and completely took over the church space up to the main entrance, preventing parishioners and even the priest from gaining access to the Church. This became worse during Ramadan. We entered into dialogue to address the problem but never succeeded as the authorities did not take our case seriously. We endured all the troubles and tried to avoid any form of confrontation. We felt intimidated and threatened right on our property.

Suddenly a huge Muslim mob stormed the Church compound immediately after their Friday's prayers on April 20, 2007. The mob forced their way into the Church compound and attacked the Parish office, broke the doors



Bishop Ellison flanked by Fr. Eyo (right) and Fr. Mbah (left) another MSP missionary in The Gambia.

and windows, vandalized the Church and assaulted me causing bodily harm. The mob chanted abusive words, cursing Christianity and the Church. They smashed the glass door which fell on me and I sustained serious injuries on my hand and lost some valuable items in the Parish Office.

This incident and two other violent attacks on me in the course of my mission work in The Gambia have shaped my notion of being a missionary priest. I have endured a lot of pains and trials in the process of my ministry in the past six years. Yet, I have also enjoyed the support of some good friends, parishioners, associates, fellow country people and concerned citizens of The Gambia who have stood by me during my trying period. I believe I have fought the good fight of faith and now I look forward to ending my ministry here some day, trusting that the seed of faith we have scattered in The Gambian soil will grow from strength to strength. Pray for us and may Jesus strengthen us.

Smooth and Solemn Transition in Oyo Diocese

November 2009 remains a most memorable month in Oyo diocese and indeed the entire Catholic Church in Nigeria. On Wednesday November 4, Bishop Julius Babatunde Adalokun marked his 75th Birthday and retirement from office as the Ordinary of Oyo diocese. Bishop Adalokun became bishop of the old Oyo diocese, which is now Oshogbo and Oyo dioceses, in 1973. He is renowned for his unequalled grass root approach to evangelization as well as his warm fatherly bond with the clergy, religious and entire people of God in the diocese. Bishop Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo has since assumed office as the new bishop of Oyo with a solemn installation Mass celebrated at the Our Lady of Assumption Cathedral, Asogo, Oyo. Archbishop

Felix Job presided over the installation while Archbishop John Onaiyekan was the homilist of the day.



Ambassador



Mr. Daniel Panik (former Protestant) being received into full communion with the Catholic Church at St Bartholomew Church Yonkers. (From left) Fr. Francis Oroffa, Mr Panik, Fr. Bassey, Louisa Ferreira (his sponsor) the Superior General, Very Rev. Anselm Umoren, MSP.



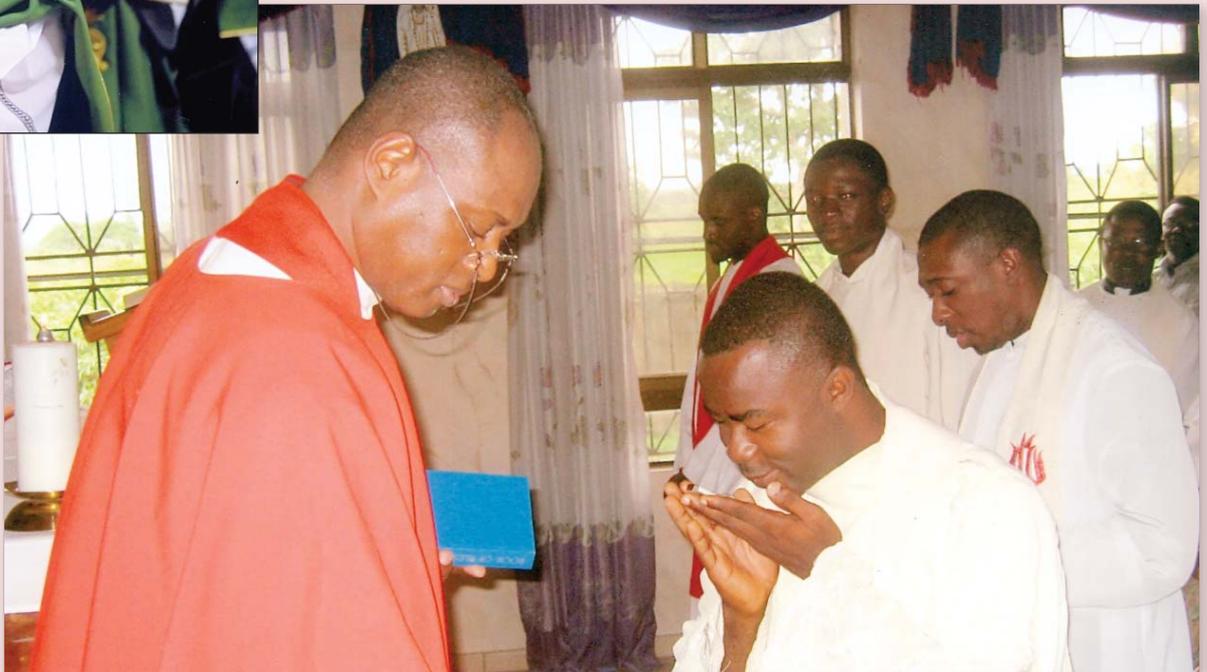
Newly professed Sisters of St Louis, Martha, Martina, Mary, Bridget and Gertrude with Bishops and their provincial.



Bishop Fasina of Ijebu-Ode diocese (middle) with other priests after a funeral Mass for Fr. Aguinam in Iperu on November 6, 2009.



Nigerian bishops at the Synod (second from left) Archbishop Onaiyekan (second from right) Archbishop Job. Courtesy - L'Osservatore Romano



Fr. Faustinus Okeyikam on mission to Sudan receives blessing from Superior General before his departure for Mission in Sudan.

I Love the House where you live, O Lord

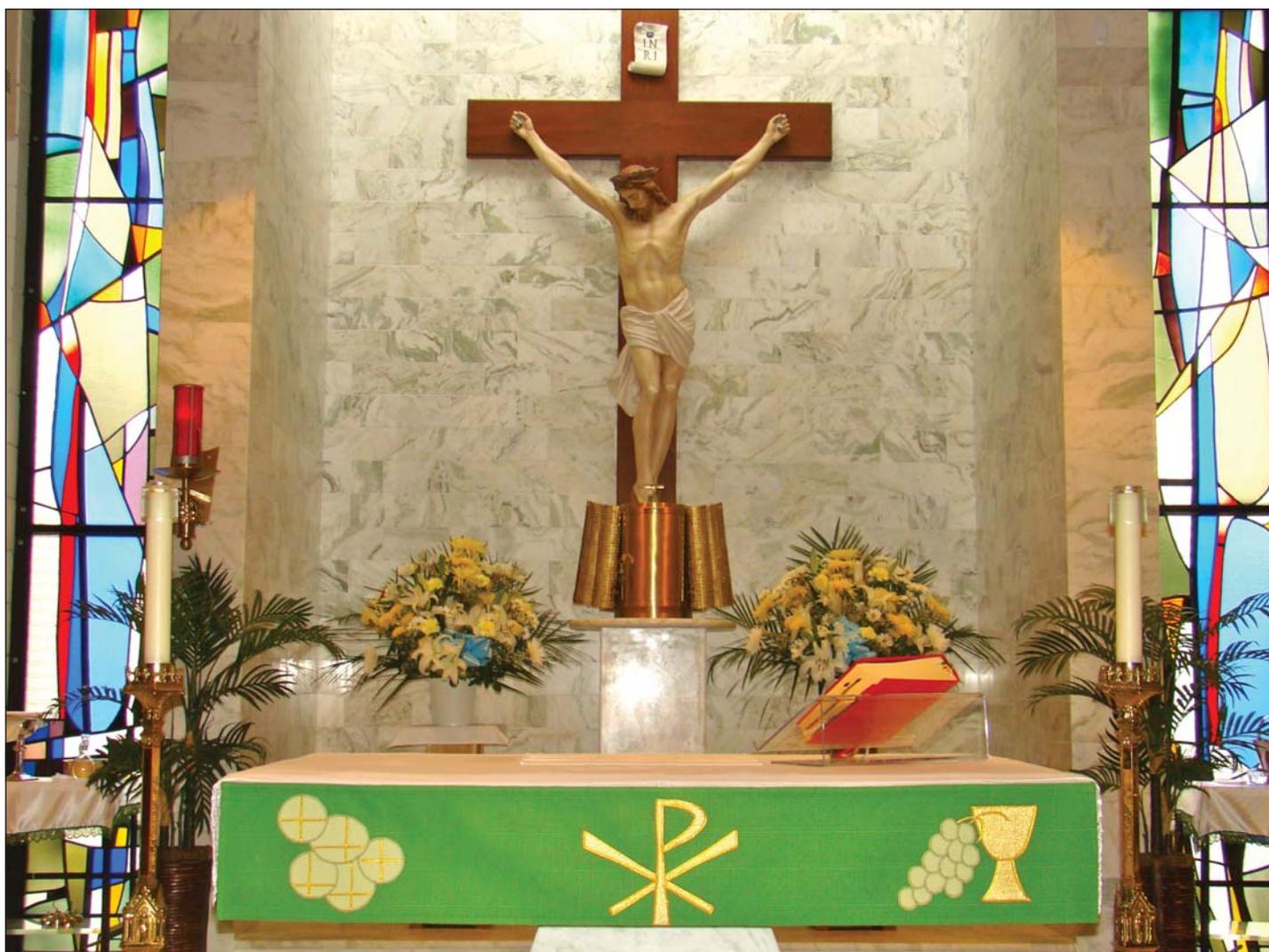
By Msgr. John Kennedy

It is now ten years since I began coming to this Church. In the past, before the renovations had taken place, it was not easy to see just where the dividing line was between the sanctuary and the body of the Church. A red carpet covered the entire floor. Now, with this magnificent new altar and lectern, as well as the white marble sanctuary and the area surrounding the altar and crucifix, everything is completely transformed. I would like to pay a heartfelt tribute to Fathers Anthony Bassey and Francis Oroffa and to you, the parishioners of St. Bartholomew's parish, for the inspiration and the wonderful work that you have all done to make this Church a beautiful place to come and worship the Lord.

Sitting at the back of the Church the evening I arrived I had a definite sense that this place has now become

special and holy. I did not get the same feeling -I must be honest- in the past. It was sometimes difficult to know where to focus, even though the tabernacle was at the centre behind the altar. I felt distracted sometimes. The new altar, on the contrary, is very attractive and distinguished, and so it should be since Christ becomes present here every time the Eucharist is celebrated. The old lectern was not very memorable either. Now, we can give great dignity and honour to the Word of God when it is proclaimed here every day with this new, very impressive lectern.

That said, the most striking transformation that has taken place in my opinion is the area behind the altar, that is to say, on the walls surrounding the crucifix and the new tabernacle. This was once a dark spot but now,



with the addition of the delicate white marble, I have come to realize how much of God's beautiful light fills the sanctuary and extends from there into the body of the Church. The lights streams in and fills the whole altar area with radiant brightness. There is now a glow where there were once shadows. You cannot help but be transfixed by this brightness and drawn into prayer. How apt the words of the Psalm now seem which say: *For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light (Ps. 39:9)*. We are also perhaps reminded that the colour white is often used in the Bible to speak about God's divinity. Think, for example, of the account of the Transfiguration in the New Testament: *After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light (Mt 17:1-3)*

Of course we realize that all of these renovations are the work of human hands, all using materials that are found on the earth—marble, stone and metal. However, we are also conscious that human beings are only able to produce such creative works because of the talents they have received from God, because they are co-creators with the Lord.

The inspiration for doing these things, the reason why we make a fitting place for God is because he has prepared a place for us in heaven. We may be building a house for the Lord but it is only in return for what he has done for us: *Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house (2Sam 7:10)*.

The gospel according to St John also reminds us of this eternal truth: *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you (Jn 14:2)*. I say these words to you when the Church throughout the world celebrates Trinity Sunday. The Trinity is a great mystery, and we are only able to comprehend certain elements of it while here on earth. We know that the Father sent his Son Jesus to save us and, after his death and Resurrection, Jesus returned to the Father, promising that he would send the Holy Spirit to his disciples so that they too could continue

to hope until the Lord comes again. The liturgy we celebrate today -like all liturgy- is supposed to give us a foretaste of the divine, a taste of the heavenly banquet.

Yet even though this is beyond our complete understanding, everyday we are reminded at various moments about the ways in which the Trinity is part of our everyday lives. When we bless ourselves - at mealtimes, when we pass by a Church on the way to school or work - we do so in the name of the Trinity. We always begin our prayers with the sign of the cross. Thus, we pray in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

When we baptize a child and welcome him or her into the family of the Church, we call upon the name of the Trinity. All of the sacraments remind us in various ways of the workings of the three Persons of the Trinity. Notice how often we mention the three persons of the Trinity in quick succession. Take, for instance, any of the prefaces in the Eucharistic prayer: *When Your children sinned and wandered far from Your friendship, You reunited them with Yourself through the blood of Your Son and the power of the Holy Spirit. You gather them into Your Church, to be one as You, Father are one with Your Son and the Holy Spirit (preface of Sundays in Ordinary Time VIII)*.

The mystery of the Trinity bursts forth into our lives like the light breaking through this sanctuary, filling us with hope and faith. We cannot see the light itself but in this light we can see all that God has created. May the celebrations to mark the centennial of this parish bring us all to a deeper faith in God and draw us closer to each other as a parish community.

Monsignor Kennedy is a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin and an Official at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in Rome. These reflections were given at St. Bartholomew's Church Yonkers, New York on Trinity Sunday this year. St. Bartholomew is under the pastoral care of the MSP.

The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Sisters

By Sr. Juliana K. Osiyemi, EHJ

Archbishop Leo Hale Taylor, SMA took up the challenge to start the Congregation of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus (EHJ) in January 1943 with five young ladies in order to promote the glory of God and the sanctification of the members. This was in response to the observation of Cardinal Riberi (the Papal Delegate to British East and West African Colonies) about the absence of African girls in the rank and file of the Religious in Lagos. The Congregation of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus is an Institute of Pontifical Right. The spirit/charism of the Congregation is one of sharing the sentiment of Christ when He gave us the Eucharist. The mission of the EHJ sisters is to be a great missionary power, making Christ presence meaningful to the people by being engaged in educational, medical, social and pastoral apostolic activities. The Sisters carry out their mission of grass root evangelization among the poor and disadvantaged in many dioceses within Nigeria. The

Sisters are also working in Canada and USA. The Sisters are engaged in the following apostolate: medical, teaching, pastoral and social.

The 8th General Chapter of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus took place from 3rd September 2009 to 16th September 2009, at the EHJ Generalate in Ikeja, Lagos. All the Sisters in the various communities prayed firmly that the spirit of the Capitulars may be open and perceptive in discovering the will of God for the Congregation. General Chapter is the highest authority of an institute when in session. Its foremost duty is to protect the patrimony of the Institute and promote suitable renewal in accord with this, to elect the Superior General, to treat major business matters and publish norms which all are bound to obey. This is why many Congregations view the period of the General Chapter as a crucial period in the life of their Congregation. They usually implore prayerful support for divine guidance

and direction for a successful chapter and fruitful results.

At the Opening Mass of the Chapter on 3rd September 2009, Anthony Cardinal Okogie exhorted the Sisters to give thanks to God for the gift of their togetherness as members of one family – the family of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. Furthermore he said “During this Chapter you will have ample opportunity to



Members of the new administrative team from left- Sr. Fidelia Alao - Councilor, Sr. Fausta Manafa - Vicar General, Sr. Agatha Osarenkhoe - Superior General, Sr. Juliana K. Osiyemi - Councilor, Sr. Cecilia Omeife - Councilor

journey along the path of faith, hope and love deliberating about the affairs of your Congregation, confessing and admitting your faults while at the same time re-examining the Charism of your Founder, Archbishop Leo Hale Taylor, in line with your present apostolate”. During the Chapter, elections were held and the following emerged as members of the new administrative team: Sr. Agatha Osarenkhoe – Superior General, Sr. Fausta Manafa - Councilor and Vicar General, Sr. Juliana Osiyemi - Councilor, Sr. Fidelia Alao - Councilor and Sr. Cecilia Omeife - Councilor. These Sisters have made personal commitment with God that they shall render loving service to their beloved Congregation. They shall pilot the affairs of the Congregation for the next six years, September 2009 till September 2015. On 16th September 2009, at the thanksgiving Mass to celebrate the end of the 8th General Chapter, Monsignor Bernard Okodua thanked the outgoing administration for the work they did in the previous six years. He advised the new administration to work as a team and to render service in love. He told them to shun gossip and stories of ‘dem say’ that cannot be authenticated. He assured the Sisters of the love and interest of the Cardinal, Priest and Laity of the Archdiocese of Lagos in the affairs of the Congregation.

He encouraged the Sisters to learn lessons of forgiveness and pastoral zeal from the lives of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian whose feast day occurred on 16th September, the day the thanksgiving Mass was being celebrated in the Chapel of the Sisters’ Generalate.



Sr. Mary Agatha Osarenkhoe, EHV newly elected Superior General

Volunteer joins MSP mission in Malawi

Caroline Drake recently joined Missionary Society St Paul, Bowe Mission in Malawi as a volunteer from Orant Charities, an American based charity organization reports Fr. Emmanuel Akpaidem, MSP. She has accepted the position as the community development program coordinator for Bowe.

Caroline first came to Malawi in 2007 as an American Peace Corps volunteer serving as a community health advisor for rural villages near the Bowe area. Her experience has offered near fluency in the local language as well as invaluable field work strengthening her knowledge and skills in program development and management, monitoring and evaluation, and also networking within the culture and systems of the Malawian government and foreign aid.

Caroline originally comes from Kalamazoo, Michigan in the USA. She received her Bachelor’s degree in Social Work in 2007 from Western Michigan University. She

has hopes of returning to school for a Master’s degree in Social Work with an emphasis on community development. Caroline enjoys running, soccer, reading, writing and dancing.



Caroline Drake

Parish Etiquette at Mass 3

By Barbara Budde

Our Children at Mass

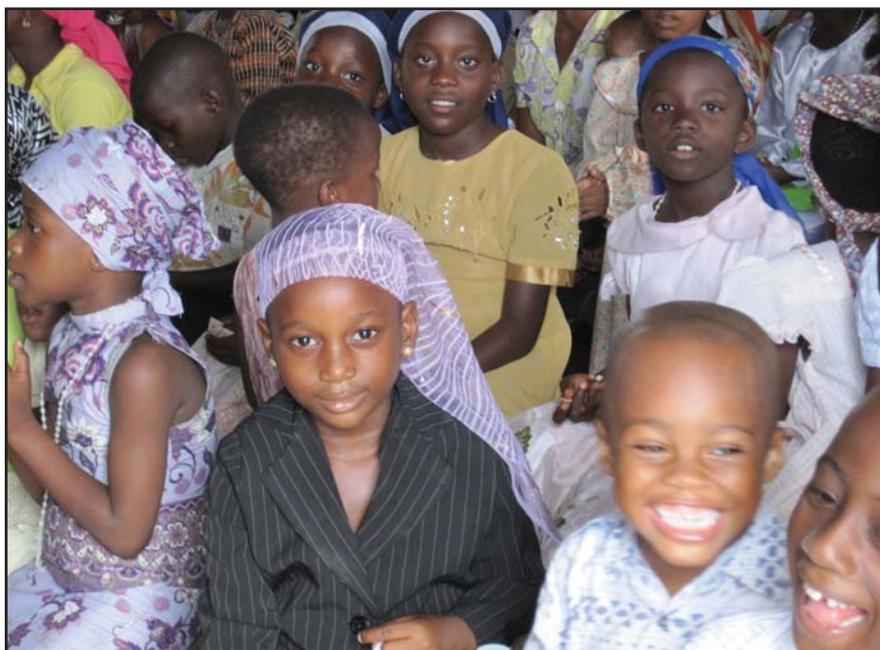
Children are welcome at Mass! Most children are likely to be baptized members of the parish. We are committed to their ongoing faith development. Children need to be part of worship to learn how to worship. And we adults need them among us to help us remember that we are all children before God. It is only normal to expect young children to be distracting to parents and to others in the assembly sometimes. Etiquette concerns how to keep distractions to a minimum and what to do when they do occur. If you find yourself especially sensitive to noise or distractions, consider attending the Mass with the fewest number of children. But don't deprive yourself too often. Children are a special gift to every worshipping community.

Infants and very young children

- ❖ Talk about prayer, the parts of the Mass, and what children will see and hear when they attend the liturgy before you leave home. Explain that church is a place where people speak quietly and move slowly and calmly.
- ❖ Communicate clearly to your children your hopes and expectations of their behaviour
- ❖ Remind young children of what is good and proper behaviour just before entering the Church
- ❖ Bring a few small, quiet toys or colouring books with crayons for children to use during Mass.
- ❖ Attend special liturgies for children and families, when offered.
- ❖ Select a place in the assembly that will best facilitate everyone's participation. That may be at the front where children's interest can be stimulated. There, they can see the priest, the servers, the lectors, the action. Sitting up front and to the side is often a good

solution for families with small children. Your child and the layout of your church may help you decide which is the best place to sit.

- ❖ Set a good example by remaining as calm and prayerful as possible yourself.
- ❖ Quietly interpret for your child what is happening during Mass.
- ❖ Encourage your child to learn and participate in the actions of the Mass: making the sign of the cross, sitting, standing, kneeling, listening, responding, singing.
- ❖ Take your child out of the assembly if he or she becomes too loud or distracting to others.
- ❖ Compliment your child's good behaviour at the end of Mass.
- ❖ Help your child to get to know parish staff members, ministers, and other parishioners so that they themselves are known as participants in the prayer community.
- ❖ Leave electronic games at home or in the car.
- ❖ Clean up after your child and yourself when the Mass is ended.
- ❖ Remember that children learn by observing you and others, whether you are intending to teach or not.



A group of children at Mass



The final journey home.

Remembering Rev. Fr Basil Aguinam, MSP

By Fr Martin Yina, MSP

The loss of the MSP family here on earth is the gain of its community in heaven. As the Society's community in heaven grows, it is now sure of singing in harmony with Fr. Basil Aguinam who had a great passion for liturgical music. He also carried that same passion and zeal in all that he did in his ministry as a priest.

Fr Aguinam was born fifth in a family of seven on June 9, 1955 to Mr & Mrs Mark and Paulina Okoli (both deceased). He had his primary school education at the Central School, Obeledu in the present day Anambra State from 1961 – 1971. He then went into business for a while before going back to undertake his secondary school education at the All Hallows' Seminary, Onitsha from 1976 – 1981. Two years later he was admitted to begin his one year of spiritual formation at the Missionary Society of St Paul's Formation House in Iperu-Remo, Ogun State. This was followed by his three and four years' studies of philosophy and theology respectively in the National Missionary Seminary of St Paul, Gwagwalada, Abuja. He was ordained a deacon on December 8, 1990 and a priest on June 22, 1991.

After his ordination, he was assigned to Idah Diocese for his one year pastoral experience, which he undertook in St Peter Claver Church Akpanya. Subsequently, he was sent on mission to Sierra Leone, and he left Nigeria on September 21, 1992. He worked in St Theresa Parish, Tonibara (Sierra Leone), and at the same time taught Christian Religious Education in a Catholic secondary school. However, his mission in Sierra Leone was cut short by the war there and he returned to Nigeria in 1995. He was

assigned to Abuja Archdiocese, where he served in St Mary's Parish Karu for a while.

On May 15, 1996, Fr Aguinam received another letter from the superior general of the Society appointing him as the bursar of the National Missionary Seminary of St Paul, Gwagwalada. The appointment took effect on September 6, 1996. He successfully completed his two three-year terms as the seminary bursar in 2002, after which he was sent on mission to Lagos Archdiocese. He served as the assistant parish priest at Holy Family Catholic Church, Festac Town, for a while and was appointed parish priest of St Brigid's Parish Ijeshatedo, and later the parish priest of St Thomas Parish, Onilekere, Ikeja. It was while ministering in Ijeshata that he had a case of food poison that triggered off his ill health that eventually led to his withdrawal from Lagos Archdiocese in January 2007. He was assigned to the MSP Community in Iperu-Remo and was receiving medical attention. However, without warning of any sort, he retired for his usual night rest and slept on to the Lord in the early hours of Thursday October 22, 2009.

Fr Aguinam was a simple and dedicated missionary. He had a great passion for his priestly ministry and was committed to whatever assignment that was given to him. He has left behind a legacy of hard work, simplicity and commitment. Farewell, dear brother; go in peace to your eternal reward. We hope to meet again one day and sing, once more, the alleluia chorus that you loved singing while here on earth with us.

“We need a spirituality of the rainy season and harmattan”

Interview with Fr. Uwem Akpan, SJ, Winner of Commonwealth Writers Prize, 2009, Best First Book (African Region)

*Uwem Akpan is a Nigerian Jesuit priest who has written an award-winning collection of short stories titled *Say You're One of Them*. Apart from the Commonwealth Prize, this debut book has won the PEN Beyond The Margins Award 2009, was longlisted for the UK Guardian Best First Book Prize 2008 and the Story Prize 2008 and was finalist for the Caine Prize for African Writing 2007, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize 2009 and Hurston/Wright Legacy Award 2009. The first part of this interview was published in the last edition. We present the final and concluding part. He spoke to Patrick E. Akekpe, MSP, editor, and Titus Ay'mger at his parish, Christ the King Church, Ilasamaja, Lagos, Nigeria.*

CA: You write about very serious issues such as pain and suffering especially the suffering of children. These are some of the issues that make Africa a laughing stock in the eyes of the so-called civilized world. What do you hope to achieve by focusing on this ugly aspect of modern African societies. Are there no other positive things you could write about?

UA: Thank you very much. We'll continue to be a laughing stock if we can't have something as basic as constant electricity...now to your question, if you go to the university to get a degree in English anywhere in the world, you'll run into Greek tragedy. You must read Greek tragedy; otherwise, they won't give you that certificate! You want to say, were there no positive things in Greece? There were! But Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, if I may invoke these names, looked at humanity at its most complex level and came out with their tragedies and these have survived. So I think we can also get a collection of African tragedies. When our young people are reading about ancient Greece, Shakespearean tragedy, they also can say, this is ours. So it was a very intentional move to write tragedy. I set out to do that. I didn't set out to write comedy. When you read the book, you'll realize that the children are very resilient and hopeful and intelligent and that many of the characters are not victims, which is how the Westerners are always presenting us. That's the second point. The third point is the Jews are still presenting the Holocaust to the world and they won't stop. The Vietnam War has a memorial in the US. Why can't we have a memorial here to the Nigerian-Biafran War? We must confront our own histories, no matter the

discomfort. We need reminders of where we have been.

CA: Priests and religious are often encouraged to read spiritual books. Many people are surprised that a priest can write an award-winning book of fiction. Some priests and religious even see reading fiction as a waste of time. What role can an encounter with literature play in helping to develop an integral spirituality both for priests and religious?

UA: When you look at the gospels, Christ really comes alive for the whole world when he's telling parables. They're very well told; they drive home his message.



And he tells these parables without spiritualizing them. If you want to know who your neighbour is, read the Good Samaritan. If you want to know about forgiveness, read the Prodigal Son. So I think we should know something about story telling. And I must say, the fact that priests and religious are not writers of stories like I am does not mean that their work has nothing to do with poetry or story telling. The moment you stand before the people to preach, what are you doing except travelling the region of poetry? People will be touched if you tell a bit of story about your life; they will all sit up. So, I tend to take a positive look at literature and poetry and what it can do for our evangelization. The priest who talks in our native proverbs gets the people excited. The priest who brings in a bit of fable gets the people's attention. This is ours. The Indians are doing it. The Jesuit Tony de Mello did a lot using the Asian mythology to bring the mythology to bring the message of Christ to his own people. We have underdeveloped our potential. Also, I

believe that though we're blessed with a powerful group of educated clergy in Africa, we have failed to produce materials for spiritual reading. Many of us write for academic journals, if that. So if you want to do spiritual reading you are hardpressed to find something locally. You may have to go to the US or Europe and now to Asia just because those people have really sat down to tell their own stories. My problem is that we have short-changed our educated Catholics. They want something to read, something that deals with the immediacy of their lives; they have nothing to read. What do they do? They turn to The Watchtower magazine by the Jehovah witness, because this is well written. And can you imagine how that influences their lives? Is there no way we clergy and religious can help our people see the beauty of God in our experiences and histories and lives? While it is good to read the Western spirituality of winter, spring, summer and fall, we also need to explore in writing the spirituality of rainy season, of Harmattan, of eating termites, of dry season, of all these things that have shaped us. Why can't we write prayers? Must our prayer books always come from the whites?

CA: You minister in a parish located in a slum area of Lagos. Most of the people are materially poor. Yet in the midst of this poverty the priests manage to live comfortably. As a writer does any conflict arise in you when you see this disparity?

UA: I am not just touched because I am a writer, sometimes I feel guilty about this as a priest. I'm always very touched by the poverty of our people. I must say though that priests and religious anywhere in the world belong to a stratum of the middle class. I don't see how the system can be run in such a way that we belong to the extremely poor. Priests and religious don't belong to that class, but they should speak FOR that class. Yes, the conflict is there. But I think if we speak for these very poor people we shall get some peace. But if we align with the super rich because we want comfort and we don't challenge them, then we become like these popular Pentecostal preachers who have stopped talking about the ills of society. How many

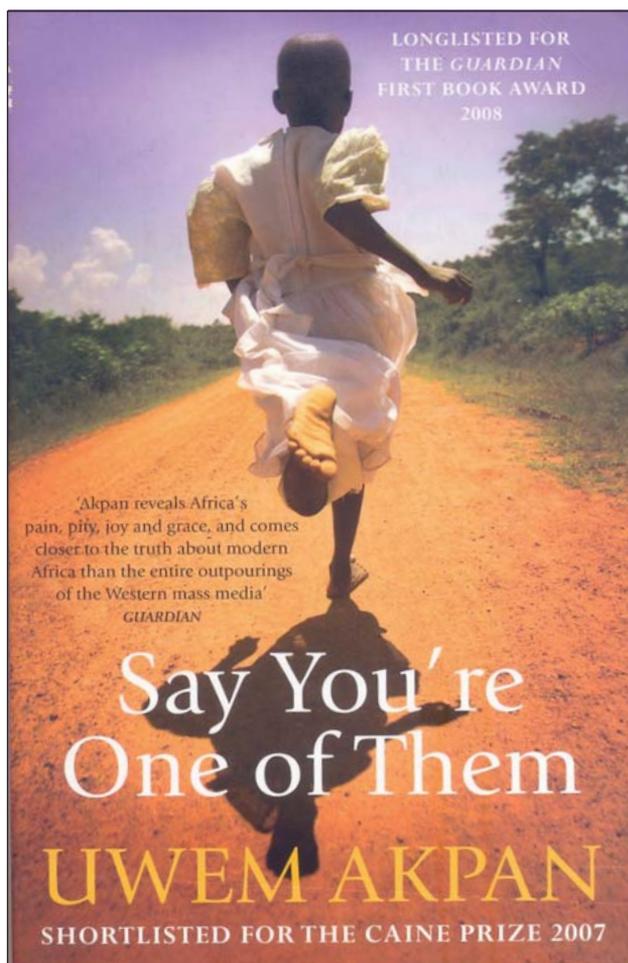
of these powerful preachers would be willing to die for Nigeria? Only the human rights activists accept to lay down their lives for the common good. No bishop, no priest, no seminarian, no Reverend Sister, no Pentecostal preacher was killed defending the common man during the Abacha regime. It's only these human rights activists who were being killed. It's the kind of history we must look at and ask ourselves: why are we—who have supposedly given it all up—not available to take these risks for the sake of the common good? Why are religious and priests accepting this martyrdom in other parts of the world and not in Africa? Also, I think we religious leaders must ask ourselves many

questions—if we are to be a haven for the larger society. Are we accountable in our parishes and dioceses? If a serious auditor looks at our books, can we hold our own? Is there peace in the convents? Can a knight ever be suspended or expelled because he is a very corrupt politician, a clear menace to common good, an embarrassment to the Church? Are some of our bishops, clearly old and feeble, able to let go of some power and ask for an auxiliary—and when the See is finally vacant, why are we priests fighting each other, like politicians, to be made bishop...we must raise our game; otherwise, we squander the huge trust placed on us by the poor. To this extent then I must say I live in admiration of

all the priests and religious who have lost their lives to interreligious intolerance and riots in northern Nigeria.

CA: What's your hope for the Nigerian Church?

UA: Our Nigerian Church, our African Church is vibrant. The liturgies are beautiful and prayers spontaneous. Lots of devotion. The Spirit is alive, and we have the numbers. But we must be careful: in many Catholic churches in our country, we need to maintain our Catholic tradition and ensure that our structures



function well. We the clergy must ensure that our long years of formation bear good fruits in our parishes and works. For example, why would a man spend 10 years in the seminary and not know how to preach? Public speaking is a skill that can be taught and learnt. I'd also love to see our priests spend more time in the confessional. It shouldn't be a three-minute affair. It shouldn't be a question of someone enumerating his sins as he was taught to do when he was seven! A bit of counselling needs to be part of this. It's a very potent forum if the priest knows his onions. I think it's the closest most Catholics get to spiritual direction. We must give them that chance. We must be gentle towards them. It must be very personal. I think this is why Rome is uncomfortable with the impersonal, general-absolution type of confessions. Third, the fact that the Pentecostals are putting pressure on us doesn't mean we must forget our Catholic traditions. How many people still genuflect when they enter or leave the church? Spending quiet time before the Blessed Sacrament or attending the Holy Hour is to be encouraged. Prayer is generally becoming a very loud thing in this country, and I'm afraid some "prayer warriors" cannot hear themselves or, worst still, are afraid to sit in silence and listen to themselves and their hearts.

CA: One of your stories is set in Rwanda . How do we explain the tragedy of the 1994 genocide in a country that is presumably 95% Catholic? Is it a failure of evangelization?

UA: There is always more we can do to deepen the faith. Of course, we're all embarrassed by what happened in Rwanda. Let me begin this answer from Iraq which is 90% or more Moslems...the Shiites and the Sunnis Muslims are killing each other. Power and the structures of power and manipulation often lead to these tragedies. Someone feels excluded and goes for the other's jugular. At that level, that person is not talking religion. Religion has been used in many instances to manipulate because people really give over their lives completely to religion. And so the powers that be, politicians and religious leaders, know immediately what buttons to press to get a reaction. If you go to Kosovo you'll see the same thing like this genocide. I'm very sad that some Rwandan priests, Sisters and even bishops failed to protect their people, betrayed their people. Well you must put this side by side with the many that did and have not been celebrated. You don't hear this in the world press. But each time a priest is arrested, that's the one that hits the limelight...yes I'm disappointed that

the Rwandan genocide happened. I wish this did not happen to a Catholic country. I also wish priests didn't abuse children in the USA. Is this failure of evangelization? I think this serious breach of celibacy shattered the sanctimony of many an American priest or religious...evil is deep and grace is also deep, according to the Letter to the Romans.

CA: Most of the authors that have had international limelight from Nigeria are those that were published outside the country, how do you see the future of a writer published here?

UA: Now, the novice Nigerian writer has a lot of excitement but may not have the grooming room. In Europe and America, you have writing schools where you apply and send your stories. If they think they're promising, they admit you and give you a scholarship for two years. These programs are run by writers. They might help you find your voice. It's an apprenticeship... I must say also that writing is like music. While some need guidance on the way, others can develop on their own. So it's not every writer that can benefit from writing school. As a beginner, you need to figure out whether writing school can help you....The big publishing houses can also serve as a grooming room, if you have a promising manuscript. But in Nigeria, most outfits that parade themselves as publishers are mere printing or binding shops. If you give them money they'll publish anything, whereas these established publishers out there only publish what is of quality. You don't pay them, no, they pay you and sign a contract. Another thing is there's no university in Nigeria that offers creative writing or that has an MFA programme. South Africa is beginning to have that and publishing is more serious there than here. Unless we do these things you can't get anywhere. Talent is not enough. You have to develop the talent, not just bury it like that man in the Bible. Again, education has collapsed in Nigeria. (Our leaders send their children abroad for education.) Some university graduates don't know how to write a letter or any type of essay. Can anybody really learn to write if an English course in a federal university has 400 or 1000 students? What teacher can sit down and thoroughly correct 400 essays in a semester? Is that teacher expected to publish his or own writing too? Another thing is that in many of these nursery schools springing up in our neighbourhoods most of their teachers are people who couldn't pass English and Mathematics to get into the university...Anybody who wants to write in this country has to go back to read the masters. Don't just read anything; get things that are written well.



Daily Prayer for MSP

Heavenly Father, you created us and you care for us:

We thank you for taking the Missionary Society of St. Paul into your care.

We ask you to continue to watch over us. Fill us with your love, and help us to build a family where each member irrespective of tribe, feels at home with other members and is encouraged to give his best in the missionary work.

Lord Jesus, you died for us and you call us to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth: we thank you for enabling us to participate in this your saving work among people of every race. Fill us with zeal and a sense of commitment like St. Paul, to bear witness to your love and reconciliation. Help us with a lifestyle that will make us proclaim your Word with power and conviction. Send us your grace to make good whatever is lacking in us as individuals and as a Society.

❖ Holy Spirit, you enlightened the hearts of the apostles, we beseech you now to continue to enlighten us and consecrate us in the truth. May each of us realize how invaluable our contributions can be, and thus invest our energies towards the success of our missionary endeavours. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady Queen of Apostles, pray for us
St. Paul our Patron, pray for us,
May the souls of our departed MSP brothers, AMSP brothers and sisters, and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.

(To be said daily by all MSP and AMSP)

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HAVE you renewed your subscription this year? Would you like to subscribe to The Catholic Ambassador magazine? The Catholic Ambassador magazine is a mission magazine published quarterly. It is thought provoking, Christian, doctrinal, informative, challenging and mission oriented. It contains articles that will appeal to parents, teenagers, religious, teachers, priests and everyone.

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CHRISTMAS 2009 - STOP, LOOK, LISTEN

Fr. Schineller writes from New York City

Life in the middle of New York City is quite different from my experience of life in Port Harcourt, Lagos, or Abuja. I see far fewer children and infants on the streets of New York than I did in Africa. But one place where I do frequently see babies is in strollers on the underground trains, the subway.

And what a marvel or indeed, I might call it a miracle. The little baby makes a big difference. Busy commuters rushing about look up from reading their paper or snoozing, and try to catch the baby's eye. Sneaky smiles break out and the baby becomes a centre of attention and attraction.

Can we not imagine that this was how the simple shepherds must have reacted on that first Christmas day 2000 years ago in Bethlehem? And the more sophisticated wise men who traveled far with their gifts also must have smiled and admired with awe the child of Mary. Wonder of wonders as we now know more fully. This Child, this infant, this divine Child is the first-born, the Son of God. He is destined to be the world's Savior. And what about us? Do we take time to visit and admire the Child? STOP, LOOK, LISTEN - was a sign that I frequently saw and sometimes still see near a railroad crossing. Cars and trucks – and pedestrians too - must stop, look, listen, before crossing the tracks. Christmas 2009 calls each of us in our own way, to STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN. STOP: Slow down; take time out of a busy life to remember that it is Christmas. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. The child born 2000 years ago is waiting to be born again today. LOOK: like those riding in the trains in New York City, we must look, admire, smile, and get close to the infant and his mother Mary. LISTEN. This may take a few minutes of quiet. We might speak to, and even sing a Christmas carol for the Child Jesus, but more importantly we must listen, and allow the peace and joy and quiet to enter our hearts.

Like one of the shepherds or wise men, we too go to Jesus and his mother. Let the story come alive today. Perhaps a

visit to the crib at the Church, or more simply a Christmas card with the Nativity scene will enable you to picture and admire the child, like the busy people in the New York City subway. And we Christians see so much more, because our faith tells us that the child is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, the Prince of Peace!



In this quiet way we let the good news of his birth once again bring peace, joy, light and love into our hearts, our lives, our family, our world. In the words of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart, "If Christ were born 1000 times in Bethlehem, but not in you, it would all be in vain." The child Jesus wants to enter our world again.

But the full meaning of Christmas does not stop there. The good news of Christmas is contagious. The shepherds and wise men are changed. They must tell the good news to others. So must we. "What help is it to me that the Father gives birth to his son, unless I too give birth to him" (Eckhart). We can and must help Jesus to be born in others – make his peace, joy, and smile more a reality in our earth. Following the example of Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, we live the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi and we become instruments of God's peace, joy, and love in our world. Then indeed it is a Blessed Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

A Tiny Child

By Dr. (Sr.) Léonie McSweeney, MB, MMM, MFR

Approaching Christmas I thought of our Redeemer becoming a tiny child in Mary's womb and the wonder of the communication that occurred between Jesus and John the Baptist when Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. This reminded me of the amazement I felt when I first observed the beating heart of a child, five or six weeks after conception. I wrote about it many years ago in the Ambassador, but I think readers will be happy to hear about it again, along with a different but similar experience of Dr. Paul Rockwell, an anaesthetist in the U.S. Let me begin with his astonishing story, quoted from an article he wrote.

The experience of Dr. Rockwell

"Eleven years ago I was giving an anaesthetic to a woman with a ruptured ectopic pregnancy [that is when the newly conceived child gets stuck in one of the Fallopian Tubes and as it grows it bursts through the tube into the abdomen, with severe bleeding]. During the operation I was handed what I believe was the smallest human being ever seen *fully alive*.

The embryo sac was intact. Within the sac was a tiny human male, about 1cm.in size, swimming vigorously in the amniotic fluid, while still attached to the wall of the sac by the umbilical cord. This tiny human being was perfectly developed, with long tapering fingers, feet and toes. It was almost transparent as regards the skin. The delicate arteries and veins were visible to the end of the fingers. The baby was very much alive and swam about the sac approximately one time per second, with a swimmer's stroke. This little human did not look like the photos and models of 'embryos' which I have seen, nor did it look like the few embryos I have been able to observe since then, the reason being that it was alive. The swimming human was observed by all the theatre staff and by our children whom we called out of school to observe such a unique phenomenon. When the sac was opened the tiny human lost its life and took on the appearance of what is accepted as the appearance of an embryo at this age (blunt extremities, etc.)".

My personal experience

Reading that amazing article by Dr. Rockwell, I recalled my own experience. It was not as extraordinary as that of Dr. Rockwell, but for me it was something the memory of which I treasure. This is my story:

Several years ago I was operating on a woman in a critical condition due to an ectopic pregnancy (described above). The patient was doing well during the surgery, with all

bleeding controlled, when among the clots of blood I found a tiny embryo, three quarters of an inch long, about five weeks old, still enclosed in its sac of fluid.

The Beating Heart

As was my custom during operations for ectopic pregnancies, I held out my hand containing the tiny child for those present to see. Then I exclaimed "Ah" —. "What thing?" someone asked. No word was spoken as the theatre staff gazed in silent wonder. All could see the baby's heart beating. "God is wonderful", said one person, breaking the silence.

As with all the bodily organs the baby's heart starts forming at the time of conception and it begins to beat about 20 days after conception. But although I had been doing such surgery for over eleven years before that day, I never thought I would ever see the heart beating, without a microscope. On seeing it I was filled with a reverential awe. I could not say whether the child was male or female but I gave the name 'Maria' as I baptized him or her. On several occasions since that day, I have carefully observed and seen the heart beating in those tiny human beings. Yes indeed, God is wonderful.



Professor Jerome Lejeune, the geneticist of international fame because of his scientific research on the first days of life, had this to say: "If the fertilized egg is not of itself a full human being, it could never become a man or woman, because something would have to be added to it, and we know that this is impossible." The first cells divide, multiply and differentiate but nothing is added to that little being after the time of conception.

Books and VCDs about Billings Method of natural family planning and our recent publication, *False Beliefs about Sex & Conception* are available from P.L.A.N., address below, and many bookshops. Pro-Family Life Association of Nigeria (P.L.A.N.), P.L.A.N. National Hqrs., Opp. St.Mary's Hospital, Eleta, IBADAN. Tel. (office hours) 08066063259, 08037167664. E-mail: leomcswe@skannet.com and leomcswe@gmail.com

Blessings at Christmas

For this day is born
to you a Saviour,
who is Christ the Lord
Luke 9:11



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