

THE CATHOLIC

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Cover

A Journey of Faith to Chad Republic

EDITOR'S NOTE

A New Year Devoted to Mission Work

New beginnings, fresh starts, reaffirmations of love, and promises for a brighter future all come to mind especially as the old year paves way for a new one. We should remain hopeful and pray that the year will bring us happiness, joy, peace, prosperity, and mercy. The famous poet, T.S. Eliot, once said, "For last year's words belong to last year's language; Next year's words await another voice... And to make an end is to make a beginning." Let us let go of the failed dreams and aspirations of the past year and look forward to the New Year in optimism.



Pope Francis, during his maiden visit to Africa, maintained that injustice and corruption are sweet like sugar, but leave nations diabetic and insensitive to the plight of the poor. His gestures and words paralleled what he said in the United States, that "God weeps" when people are abused. Such denial of the basic necessities of life is evident in the missionary experience story of Fr. Bonaventure Iyiogu, MSP in South Sudan in this issue. Fr Ime Okon Inyang, MSP working in Kenya shared an eye-witness account of the Pope's visit and its implications to the African church.

Pope Francis's highly anticipated post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, "The Joy of Love," which focused on the gifts and challenges of family life, was published on April 8, 2016. *Amoris Laetitia* is the conclusion of a two-year synod of bishops held at the Vatican in 2014 and 2015, both devoted to the beauty and challenges of family life today. Emphasizing the importance of family in the human society which has come under serious attack, Pope Francis professed the need for priests to offer pastoral care, compassion, and sensitivity for families. In his message on Page 3, our superior general, Very Rev. Fr. Victor Onwukeme, MSP, encapsulates these challenges and possible pastoral plans for families.

As we conclude this Jubilee Year of Mercy, all Christians are enjoined by the pope to be missionaries of mercy to all humanity. Fr. Israel Iyakndue, MSP, in this edition shares his journey of faith to Chad Republic and his struggles and challenges in spreading the gospel of mercy.

The Missionary Society of St. Paul has laid a lasting foundation for the future in several wonderful projects formally commissioned and described in this issue. These have become a reality only by your generosity and prayers. I pray that as we have experienced the mercy, joy, and peace of Christmas and New Year, we will spread it to all around us. Wishing you all a blessed New Year!

by Fr. Dan Ifiok Udofia, MSP
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This United States edition of Ambassador magazine, published December 2016, includes excerpts from two previous Nigerian issues. Fr. Udofia's two recent editor's notes were modified to reflect the stories selected for this compilation.



P. 11—MSP priests from the Houston area at the AMSP walk



P. 13—Nigeria's largest wooden crucifix resides at St. Paul Ranch, a special place where agriculture and Christianity come together



P. 15—Fr. Israel Iyakndue, MSP, describes his work in Chad Republic

Table of Contents

Editor's Note	1
A NEW YEAR DEVOTED TO MISSION WORK	
Message of the Superior General	3
PASTORAL CHALLENGES & CARE OF THE FAMILY	
Four New Priests Join the MSP Family	4
Missionary Experience in South Sudan	5
THE GRACE OF GOD MADE MANIFEST	
A Christmas Prayer	8
Missionary Experience in Ilaje, Bariga	9
THE JOY OF SERVING AMONG EGUN PEOPLE	
Mission Outreach	10
HOW TO HELP MSP PRIESTS	
Seventh Annual Houston Walkathon	11
Walk for the Mission—Faith, Fellowship, and Fun!	
St. Paul Ranch	13
TOUR OF THE MISSION RANCH IN IPERU, REMO	
Missionary Experience to Chad Republic	15
A JOURNEY OF FAITH	
MSP Projects	17
ST. PAUL NURSERY SCHOOL	
BISHOP SANUSI HOUSE	
News Clips	18
POPE FRANCIS VISITS AFRICA	
REMEMBERING SOPHINA ONWUKEME	
MSP Appreciation Luncheon 2016	19
St. Peter the Apostle Church	21
75TH ANNIVERSARY	

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
PASTORAL CHALLENGES & CARE OF THE FAMILY

by Very Rev. Fr. Victor Onwukeme, MSP



Amoris Laetitia, "The Joy of Love," was publicly released by Pope Francis on April 8, 2016, following the Synod of the Family. MSP Superior General, Very Rev. Fr. Victor Onwukeme, explained excerpts of this apostolic exhortation—and how they relate to family life and the Church today.

The family is initiated through the coming together of a man and woman with a view to mutual support and to the bearing and raising of children. The family is the first school of human values where we learn the wise use of freedom. Here, certain inclinations develop in childhood and become so deeply rooted that they remain throughout life (*Amoris Laetitia*, 274). If our families are good, society will be good and if our families are dysfunctional, society will also be bad, because it all begins in the family. In accepting one another, the husband and wife promise total self-giving, faithfulness, and openness to new life; they recognize these elements as constitutive part of their marriage (*Amoris Laetitia*, 73). The recent synod on the family noted this and Pope Francis, through his April 2016 apostolic exhortation, underscores that this most important institution of human society has come under serious attack and so the need for pastoral care of the family is more urgent today than ever before. Let us examine briefly some of these areas.

Secularism has led to the erosion of certain traditional family values. There is fear associated with permanent commitment fuelled by the "throw away culture" of the present generation. It is a culture of use and dispose, the culture which takes and breaks, the culture which exploits and squeezes to the last drop and then says "goodbye." This culture has crept into family life, making it difficult for people to make permanent commitment in marriage. Along the same line, consumerism deters people from having children so that they can maintain a certain freedom and lifestyle.

The spread of pornography is a cause for concern. Through the internet, mobile phones, television, and other media outlets, people have easy

access to pornography and this does a lot of damage, especially, to the young people. There is the issue of human trafficking whereby young girls and boys are forced into prostitution. Many of these girls and boys are exported outside their home countries for sex trade.

Same-sex marriage is an aberration, since such relationship is not open to procreation. Pope Francis notes that no union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society. Same-sex union, therefore, cannot be equated with marriage (*Amoris Laetitia*, 52)

Frequent divorce in today's society further compounds the problem of single parenthood. Nevertheless, such single parents should receive encouragement and support from the Church. Along the same line, the Church ought to have some structures for looking after widows, orphans, refugees, people suffering from serious illness, accident victims, and the like.

Childlessness is one of the challenges facing married couples and can be a source of much suffering for the couple in question. In many African cultures, this is regarded as a curse. Even in the midst of childlessness, marriage still retains its character of being a communion of life and preserves its value and indissolubility.

Violence against women is another challenge of family life. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of conjugal love. The reprehensible genital mutilation of women practiced in some cultures must be shunned by the faithful. Women should have equal access to dignified work and be empowered to play significant roles in decision-making.

FOUR NEW PRIESTS JOIN THE MSP FAMILY

The journey to the sacred priesthood is indeed not an easy task; one may know its beginning but cannot determine its end, as the author of the book of Hebrews so rightly puts it, "No one takes the honor upon himself." (Heb 5:4).

Pastoral care of marriage and family should begin at the preparatory stage. Pastoral plan should include furnishing the intending couples with names of places, people, and services to which they can turn for help when problems arise. They should be reminded of the availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (*Amoris Laetitia*, 211). In their preparation, they are to concentrate on the essentials.

There is need for a pastoral plan for families through which the Church can show compassion and closeness to families, especially those under one crisis or the other. There is need for pastors to find the right language, arguments, logic, and forms of witness that speak to the hearts of young people and appeal to their capacity for generosity, commitment, and true love. Dialogue is an important ingredient which lubricates marriage and family life.

The Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, especially the wounded and the troubled—restoring them hope and confidence. Every pastor should have a special place in his heart for the bereaved family in his parish, identifying with them, bringing consolation and succour.

Care of the elderly is another family challenge. In many parts of the world, the number of elderly persons is growing, even as the birth rate declines. In some places, elderly persons are regarded as a burden. In Africa, elderly persons are seen as treasures and precious gifts to society.

In conclusion, Pope Francis encourages pastors to listen to the divorced and remarried with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere heart to understand their plight and their point of view and offer some guidance and direction (*Amoris Laetitia*, 312).



The journey of faith which our four brothers began some nine years ago was crowned July 2, 2016, as they were conferred with the gift of Holy Orders. The day started with heavy rainfall, leaving a dark cloud hanging in the sky. Little did we know that God was, all the while, preparing clement weather for the celebration—to shield invited guests from the usual Gwagwalada-Abuja scorching sun.

At 10 a.m., the Mass began at St. Paul's Chapel, with a long, solemn procession of priests from across the country, followed by the Metropolitan Archbishop of Onitsha as the ordaining prelate. MSP Superior General Very Rev. Fr Victor Onwukeme MSP, thanked everyone for coming, especially the ever-supportive associate missionaries (AMSP).

In his homily, the Archbishop said the priesthood is a gift, a call, and a mystery. He summarized the priesthood of Christ in one sentence: "It is a sacrifice," he said—all other things are mere commentary. The priest is called upon to sacrifice and give up himself, abandoning himself and allowing God to radiate through him.

According to the Archbishop, when the candidate lies down during the litany of the saints, he dies with Christ, and when he rises up after the litany of the saints, it is no longer his former self that lives, but a resurrected self in Christ. He enjoined the faithful to not exert much pressure on a priest; instead, they should strive to assist the priest with prayers, advice, and financial assistance.

In the rite of ordination, the Revs. Francis Akpomedaye, Clifford Oyati, Walter Ezenwosuh, Eugene Lughah, and (left to right in photo above) became priests as the Archbishop and other concelebrating priests laid their hands upon them.

Each new priest received his posting right following the ordination. Frs. Clifford and Eugene were posted to work in the Archdiocese of Abuja, while Frs. Walter and Francis were posted to Lafia and Minna Dioceses, respectively. To the glory of God, the ordination was a success and a pilgrimage for all who from different parts of the country to witness the holy ceremony.

by Rev. Emmanuel Nnamdi Megwara, MSP

The Grace of God Made Manifest

MY MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH SUDAN

*Mission reflection by Father
Bonaventure Iyogun, MSP, shown
here administering the Sacrament of
Reconciliation to a South Sudanese
parishioner.*



It all started during my first pastoral year experience at the bishop's house in the apostolic vicariate in Bomadi, Nigeria. One morning in April 2014, I got a call from the vicar general of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, Very Rev. Fr. Augustine Ogar, MSP, informing me that I had been selected to go to South Sudan. My first reaction was to ask him, "South Sudan?" And, he answered, "Yes."

I replied, "It's okay," while smiling in surprise.

Surprise because I didn't expect to be sent on mission to South Sudan after working in the Bomadi Vicariate. I started preparing my mind for the mission. Visions of hardship and war—based on stories told to us at seminary by MSP missionaries who worked in the nation—quickly came to mind. But I found joy and strength in the knowledge that the grace of God would be sufficient for me (2 Cor 12:9).

From civil war to freedom

South Sudan is the world's newest country. It became a sovereign state in 2011 after decades of struggle for freedom from the North (now Sudan), which is predominantly Muslim. Since September 2014, I have been working in the Diocese of Torit in Eastern Equatoria—one of 11 states of South Sudan. It is a multi-ethnic and multilingual society, although the town of Torit, the state capital, is dominated by the Lotuko tribe. People here speak Otuho as their local language, with Arabic and English as the official languages.

Before southern Sudan came under the rule of the Arabic North, the region was administered as one Sudan. It was in 1924 that the British separated Sudan into distinct

territories: a predominantly Muslim Arabic-speaking North, and a predominantly animist, Christian South, where English is encouraged. In 1956, Sudan became a sovereign state after a 136-year union with Egypt and 55 years of British occupation. However, the South still yearned for her autonomy, and this resulted in two civil wars in 1955 and 1983.

The second civil war was a result of the abolishment of the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region by the Sudanese Muslim government. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) split along ethnic lines between the Dinka and the Nuer tribes. The second civil war, which lasted for 22 years, finally ended in 2005, with the help of mediation from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). An autonomous government of South Sudan was formed. An overwhelming consensus vote led to South Sudan nationhood in 2011.

In December 2013, another war broke out, bringing the new nation to the brink of civil war. Like many African conflicts, this war was basically tribal, between the two major tribes in South Sudan, the Dinka and the Nuer. Salva Kiir, the country's president, is a Dinka, while Riek Machar, his former first vice president, is a Nuer. Though tensions had always existed between the two tribes due to a lack of trust, the violence of December 2013 resulted from Machar being ousted from office by President Kiir. Peace talks are still ongoing, mediated by the African Union and IGAD.

My initial culture shocks

After flying into Nairobi, Kenya, from Nigeria, we traveled by road



Fr. Bonaventure stands among his students in South Sudan.

from Lodwar to Lockichoggio in northwest Kenya, which borders southern South Sudan. It was a day's journey from Lockichoggio, to Nadapal at the border, and then to Torit, South Sudan. Far from a leisure ride, we were overwhelmed with fear and anxiety because the road is prone to attacks and clashes among herdsmen from different villages.

Upon arrival, I found a land lacking the basic necessities of life.—no paved roads, no electricity, no clean water supply, and the weather was extremely hot. Initially, I was happy that many residents could speak English, so I could communicate with them, while using interpreters to speak with those who spoke only Arabic or Otuho. The greater challenge came when I had to learn to celebrate the Eucharist in the villages using the Otuho Mass text, to communicate meaningfully and effectively.

I found certain cultural practices

shocking. A girl is practically sold into marriage by her family. Even if her husband killed her, the family would not be troubled. He would only be required to return the bride price (numerous cows).

Other practices were strange to me. In Nigeria, when exchanging pleasantries, it is customary that the elder is the first to initiate a handshake by stretching out his or her hand; if a younger person does that, it is seen as a sign of gross disrespect. In South Sudan, it is quite different. I was surprised when little children came to greet me, stretching out their hands to shake mine, one after the other, while asking me, "How are you?"

The problem of time consciousness, popularly called "African time," is prevalent. An event scheduled for 10 a.m. may not start until Noon because that's when the people will start to arrive. It is just normal!

Reaching our flock

In the main church, we ask diocesan priests who can celebrate the Eucharist in Arabic to celebrate for the few parishioners who come for the Arabic Mass (third Mass) on Sundays. It has been difficult to find someone who can read and write Arabic to teach us, especially the Mass text. Most of the locals can't write Arabic. They speak the local Arabic, which is different from classical Arabic. Generally, English is far more encouraged.

We presently have only one car in the mission for three priests. This means only one priest can go to the out-chapels (outstations) on Sundays. Sometimes, generous parishioners offer vehicles for this purpose. The out-chapels can only be accessed during the dry season. When it rains, it becomes difficult to minister to people in remote locations because the unpaved roads become muddy.

Building Trust

The residents see me first as a missionary coming to share the Gospel; this is why the diocese has requested more MSP priests to come help evangelize. Secondly, as foreigners, the people expect social assistance from us. Long years of conflict and violence have stalled development in South Sudan.

The people are very appreciative of our presence and ministry and many want us to remain. They are receptive to the Gospel message, which often challenges them. Many have started coming back to the church—especially politicians who initially felt homilies were meant to attack them. They say they can now listen to God’s word, as explained, based on the readings of the day. This has also influenced them to give generously to the building of their church.

The people are hospitable. But, little or nothing is expected from them, because they are extremely poor. Like other places, there are some who see us as threats. Most of these belong to the ranks of the diocesan clergy, who are not happy that MSP priests were assigned to the main parish in the state capital. Some even refer to us as, “those Boko Haram from Nigeria,” or “those young boys brought from Nigeria.” Yet other clergy collaborate with us, by helping with Masses.

Farming, education, health, and social amenities

People in Eastern Equatoria practice subsistence farming, mostly raising cattle. Much importance is placed on cows. Meat is a part of most meals, because they rear so much livestock. Very little of the land is cultivated. Most food crops are carbohydrates. Most goods, including vegetables, are imported from Kenya and Uganda, neighbors to the south.

The educational system is very poor, due to the country’s longtime



Fr. Bonaventure teaches Christian religious education to local children in Torit, South Sudan.

instability. The schools lack qualified teachers, learning facilities, or sound structures. Those citizens with the financial capability to do so, send their children abroad, to Kenya, Uganda, or Egypt, for secondary and university educations. Local children are encouraged to go to school, and adults who couldn’t have an education because of the war, now have the opportunity for adult education.

Basic amenities are also scarce. A

public water supply is not readily available. Most people depend on river water, which they have to purify themselves. Last year, there was an extensive cholera outbreak caused by drinking from the river, which is also used for washing, bathing, and defecation. The Red Cross came to the rescue by installing water treatment plants, and served free, potable water. The South Sudanese are highly

supported by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, so they have grown accustomed to expecting help from outsiders. At present, Torit lacks a public electricity supply.

Our pastoral initiatives

We have seen the impacts of our efforts in the parishes and people we serve. The parish formerly conducted infant baptisms only at Christmas and Easter. This meant baptizing more than 200 infants at one Mass. We now celebrate baptisms on a monthly basis. We also started speaking with people about the need to receive Holy Communion.

We instruct people to ratify their marriages in the Church. Efforts are in place to enlighten people on the need to reduce the bride price, which is so exorbitant that it is nearly impossible to pay at once. When the bride price has not been paid in full, the bride's family does not allow the couple to proceed with solemnization of Holy Matrimony in church. This practice, consequently, keeps many away from Holy Communion. Our efforts in this area appear to have paid off, as the bride price issue is being discussed by lawmakers at the parliamentary level, and has support of traditional rulers.

Another area in which I have made an impact is education. I started teaching in the parish primary school, as there was no teacher for Christian religious education. Now, Catholic prayers have been introduced and we also teach catechism before the evening Mass every day, to improve people's understanding of the faith.

My strength and inspiration

I am fulfilled in carrying out the priestly duties, for which I was ordained. The people appreciate our ministry. This has kept me going, despite the poor physical, economic, and social conditions in which we work.

A Christmas Prayer

Loving God,

Ever faithful to your promises and ever close to your people, the earth rejoices in the hope of the Savior's coming, as it looks forward to the birthday of Christ.

Prepare our hearts and help us to remove the sadness that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope which Christmas brings. May we celebrate the coming feast with love and thanksgiving.

May families, especially those divided by misunderstanding and bitterness, experience much healing and forgiveness this Christmas. May all those who are in any sort of misery or pain, especially the misery of sin, allow themselves to be touched, by the compassion of the merciful Christ Child.

Now and always, as we journey on our pilgrim way, longing with all our hearts, for you to heal our present ills, lead us to eternal joy. Make us worthy to receive, from your hand, the Bread of Heaven, at the feast of eternal life.

This Christmas we give thanks that Jesus, your son has come into our world, bringing us gifts of peace, and joy.

Bless us as we sit down together to share our meals this Christmas.

Amen.



THE JOY OF SERVING AMONG EGUN PEOPLE

by Fr. Joseph Kolade, MSP

The road to St. Raphael Catholic Church, Ilaje, Bariga, is muddy and sticky and I could never have imagined that such a community exists within the Lagos Metropolitan Area of Nigeria. The Catholic community here is predominantly Egun tribespeople, who originated from Ganvie in the Archdiocese of Cotonou in Benin Republic. The quest and search for their daily livelihood as fishermen brought them to Lagos. Here, in their struggles and challenges, they are a very happy and religious people, as typified in most Africans.

On my first day among them in October 2013, I was greatly disturbed by how people could be subjected to the kind of environmental conditions there and yet be happy and serving God with their whole lives and their resources. Their houses and living conditions beg for attention from sanitary officials and the government. The church was basically built on the waterlogged area, but through the efforts of the people at their 2014 bazaar, they were able to correct and rebuild the church to a reasonable standard. Obviously the Ilaje community of Lagos has felt little or no impact of the government in recent time.

The Egun Catholic community is excellent in worship. Their way of celebrating liturgy is unique, with singing and dancing during the liturgical celebration. Though one may not understand their language, it is hard not to dance to the rhythms of the liturgical music. For the period I spent among them, they showed a

deep sense of commitment to the Catholic faith and unparalleled loyalty to the teachings of the church. They came with their rich Catholic faith culture from Benin Republic, which enhanced their mode of worship—an interesting experience for those coming to worship with them for the first time.

During my short, but very eventful stay among them, my style of teaching the catechesis accompanied by audiovisual (projector) aids, encouraged many who had fallen away from the Catholic faith to

Father Joseph Kolade, MSP, ministered in Ilaje, a severely impoverished community in the Bariga area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The Ilaje are fishermen who migrated from Ganvie, a stilted fishing village on Lake Nokoué, near Cotonou, Benin. The Catholic community in Ilaje consists mostly of Egun people.



return. During one of the monthly special prayer sessions tagged “Divine Commando” last year, some who had been in the faith, but later resigned to fetish practices, renounced such commitment and embraced the faith anew.

When serving the people of God in St. Raphael Ilaje, their faith and trust in God—in spite of the struggling situations they encounter—

challenged my own faith. I learned that the joy of serving God lies in being present to the people entrusted to one’s care.

I give glory to God for giving me such opportunity to be part of their Christian journey. Much work still lies ahead; we can only encourage one another and pray for one another for the grace of perseverance in our Christian faith.

*Sponsor a
Missionary
Priest Today!*



The Missionary Society of St. Paul has more than 120 seminarians studying for the priesthood, with all of them supported by the society. It costs an average of \$3,000 to keep each student in the seminary for one year—this is becoming a very difficult task for the society. You can be of great help here. Please contact us to sponsor a seminarian or make a financial contribution toward his training.

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The Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria is present in ten African countries, four European countries, two Caribbean islands, the United States of America, and Canada—spreading the good news of God's salvation through parish ministry, social justice, hospital chaplaincies, schools, and spiritual formation.

MISSION OUTREACH



Frs. Ben Unwana, MSP and Joseph Ibiwoye, MSP, catechize children in Lodwar, Kenya.

MSP Mission Fields Featured in this Issue

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| ★ Lagos, Nigeria, p. 9 | ★ Goudi, Chad, p. 15 |
| ★ Iperu, Nigeria, p. 13 | ★ Torit, South Sudan, p. 5 |
| ★ Abuja, Nigeria, p. 17 | ★ Lodwar, Kenya, p. 10 |



Walk for the Mission

On a beautiful spring Saturday, dozens of walkers and runners converged at the Tom Bass Regional Park in southern Houston to celebrate the MSP vision and support missionary work. Lendy Zink, an Associate Missionary of St. Paul for several years, said the weather cooperated on April 9, 2016, for the seventh annual walk-a-thon. The Associate Missionaries of St. Paul (AMSP) met their goal of raising \$10,000 to provide education for poor children in rural African villages where the MSP serves.

The event began with a praise and worship service to “get everyone motivated and ready to walk,” Lendy said. Walkers included families, youth, MSP priests, friends, and associates.

Participation continues to grow each year, Lendy said. Besides raising needed funds for educational resources and to help orphans, the walk-a-thon serves to build fellowship and raise awareness of what MSP accomplishes in the United States and their other mission fields.

In the walk-a-thon registration form, the local AMSP group wrote:

“Our efforts are focused on empowerment through education. These efforts have included building community schools, providing food and clothing, and subsidizing school tuition for children to attend school, as well as providing care for children orphaned through the devastating effects of AIDS. Specifically we would like to provide books, computers and clothing and continue building schools and providing orphans with food and shelter.”



n—Faith, Fellowship, and Fun!





St. Paul Ranch

By Rev. Francis Raji, MSP

My name is Francis, you may call me Father Farmer. Please join me to explore St. Paul Ranch in Iperu, Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Two years ago, when the superior general of our society blessed the land for the permanent site of St. Paul Ranch, little did we know where divine grace would lead. Even now the future seems cloudy, yet we trust with confidence that He who began this good work in us will carry it on to completion (Phil 1:6).

It was indeed a virgin land uncultivated, waiting to be transformed. Fr Onwukeme prayed then that the favor of the Lord may be upon us and prosper the works of our hands (Ps 90:17).

Today, we give God all the glory for the vision and mission of St. Paul Ranch. He initiated the idea of service

and spreading the Gospel through the ranch; He provided support, funds, and people to actualize the vision.

When you visit the ranch, you will first encounter our locally designed, beautiful wooden gate. It opens up like an invitation into our serene farm environment. It leads in straight, as though opening to the crucifix.

The largest wooden crucifix in Africa: this crucifix was built in commemoration of the Festival of African Art and Culture. It is most probably the oldest and largest wooden crucifix. Like the Missionary Society of St. Paul, it was carved in 1977 and is proudly black and African. When someone said the crucifix is unattractive, we simply replied that the crucifixion of Jesus was excruciating and never attractive. This site is monumental—we are delighted to be the keeper of such a great artifact and inculturation monument.

Entering the ranch, the farm settlement is on the left and religious sites are to the right. This resonates

the colonial post-slave trade idea of the bible and the plough. A nineteenth century idea of Sir Thomas Buxton, believing that Nigerian, and indeed African empowerment, lies in Christian evangelization and agriculture. One feeds the soul and the other provides for the body. This is exactly what the MSP sets out to do through the Ranch—feed the hungry soul and the body that bears it.

On the right hand side you will find first **Massah** and **Meribah**. This site is the powerhouse of the entire ranch, providing water and electricity. Interestingly, our electricity derives from a solar system, which maintains our pledge to renewable energy and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

On the wall is an invitational psalm to be prayed as you approach **Ephesus**, the grotto of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. Visitors have the privilege of walking through the stations of the cross as they approach the grotto. These stations have been constructed with iron and concrete work. They depict in such clear pattern



Father Francis with a layer chicken, above, and with emus below. St. Paul Ranch was built upon some of the ideals of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, a British philanthropist, abolitionist, and mission theorist. Above right, Sir Buxton, 1786-1845.

the events leading to the crucifixion of Christ. The statue of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots was donated by the Manuel Okor family (Abuja) and the grotto design and building is a gift from Michael and Hellen Nwaobi, who also donated the borehole. These families share testimonies of many people who have sought the intercession of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. Some day this grotto will be a national shrine, nourishing the faith, hopes, and aspirations of millions of people who seek breakthroughs for their knotted life situations.

Our farm is like a resort. **Antioch** is the site for fresh organic vegetables, keeping the fields fresh and providing clean oxygen for humans to breathe.

At **Lystra** and **Derbe**, you will find beautiful geese and ducks, making their living. The geese are largely white in color. Both birds enjoy swimming in their little pools.

Philipi is the home of the free-range broiler birds that are organically raised to provide better quality chicken meat. **Colosae** provides a

limited free-range quality of eggs. These birds enjoy a grazing system which exposes them to sunlight and allows them to scratch the ground and eat nourishing insects. These eggs and meat are indeed high quality for better health and nourishment.

In **Galatia**, we rear regular layer birds in battery cages. These eggs are table ready and still the best providers of protein from birds.

Corinth is our largest pen, housing broiler birds which are our most regular source of income for the ranch. As our corporate responsibility we have created employment for over 20 persons and provide support for local farmers in Iperu, Remo, through tangible facilities and by introducing them to numerous market opportunities for sustainability.

To date, we have produced quality farm products for families and homes around Lagos and its environs. We have future plans to provide our quality products for Abuja. Our packed chicken, eggs, mutton, pork, snail, and other products are low-price and a delight to many homes. As a

farm resort, we are guided by Christian principles and piety.

Our vision is enriched by a strong resolve to empower people through agriculture and impact our home—Nigeria, positively. Our mission is to employ and train people in sustainable agriculture, increasing good food production amidst opportunity to encounter with God through our Lady Undoer of Knots.





A Journey of Faith to Chad Republic

“God does not call the perfect but perfects those he has called.” (Rom 8:30)

by Fr. Israel Iyakndue, MSP

The priesthood is a sacred call by God and we are only to give our answer to this call. One’s disposition matters in the response to this divine call by God to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth. As a Catholic and priest of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, I feel the graciousness of God for calling me to this office and entrusting me with the divine mandate to proclaim His word. In answer to the call to serve the people of God and in line with the vow of obedience, I happily left Abuja, Nigeria, for Chad Republic on my first missionary assignment.

My journey—overcoming a lack of French

Boko Haram, the radical Islamic terrorist group, makes traveling to Chad by road dangerous. Instead, I flew with Askya Airlines to N’Djamena, the capital city. After a 100-minute flight, we landed at N’Djamena International Airport around 9 p.m. on November 24, 2014. The 50-seat airplane operated

like a local taxi service, transporting passengers to Chad Republic from Togo, Benin Republic, and Nigeria.

The usual process for clearance by Customs and immigration agencies at the airport was complicated—I had left Abuja a “tabula rasa” (blank slate), with no ability to speak or understand French.

I found myself unable to answer the questions of immigration police. I could only say, “*Anglais, Anglais!*” (English, English!) An English-speaking policeman came to my rescue. While the officer spoke English, his English was a direct translation from French.

He asked, “You come to Chad today?” I answered, “Yes.” I didn’t understand he meant, “for the first time?” We were lost. We couldn’t understand one another, even in



English. Although clerically dressed in black with a white Roman collar, I struggled to explain that I was a priest.

The confusion at the airport was caused in part by the immigration form I had completed. I didn’t know the French word for parish is *paroisse*, Francis Xavier is *Francois Xavier*, the postal box number is written BP 87, and priest should be *pretre* or *Pasteur*. Fr. Kevin Paul Elendu, a Nigerian missionary priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) who was working in N’Djamena, had agreed to



Left, Father Israel Iyakndue, MSP, uses a motorbike to travel to remote villages in the Sarh Diocese to celebrate Mass. Page 15, top photo, the people of God celebrating the gift of the Gospel with music and drums; lower photo: Chad faithful listen during Mass.

meet me at the airport. Fr. Kevin Paul waited in the arrival lounge to receive a priest in a Roman collar. After all the passengers passed, he asked officials if any other passengers had flown with Askya Airlines. Fr. Kevin Paul was informed that one passenger was still inside with immigration agents—a man who didn't know where he would stay in Chad. Fr. Kevin Paul was permitted to see me. I was saved—and cleared for entrance into Chad.

Never discouraged

After this ordeal at the airport, I took my mind back to the apostles in the bible, who went to places and countries where they were unknown, yet made great impacts there. Also at the airport that day was Mgr. Edmond Djitangar, bishop of the Diocese of Sarh, with whom I was to work. He had come to pick up a fellow bishop from Bamako, the capital of Mali. Fr. Kevin Paul, OMI, introduced me to Bishop Djitangar, who was quite happy to see me. The bishop asked me to accompany him to his diocese, where I would work, just two days later, on Saturday. I gladly accepted the invitation to travel with the bishop.

I arrived in N'Djamena on a Thursday, leaving only Friday to complete the required immigration process—obtaining the consular card from the Nigeria Embassy in N'Djamena, registering with the Catholic Secretariat of Chad as a missionary priest, and registering with

the Chad national police. With the help of God (and Fr. Paul Kevin, OMI), all was done in one day.

Early Saturday morning, the bishop and I started our journey to Sarh, the southern part of Chad. I was shocked and confused when Bishop Djitangar himself took to the steering wheel for the eight-hour journey. I had expected a driver would be waiting for him to drive us to the diocese. The bishop drove until we reached Koumra, where my colleagues, Fr. Duke Asuquo, MSP, and Fr. Loius Takuso, MSP, came to pick me up. The joy of meeting my brothers was so much that we screamed. The bishop was excited, too, because during our long journey, he and I could only communicate through sign language.

Motorbikes on sandy roads

I enjoyed the company of my MSP brothers, living together for only a week before being posted to assist Fr. Nguertigal Bertin, a parish priest and vicar general of the Diocese of Sarh, and Fr. Allaguerganye Charles, of *Paroisse Ste. Marie de l'Annonciation* in Goundi. On December 30, Fr. Charles came to pick me from our community with a motorcycle.

The sandy road to Goundi is one of the worst roads in the diocese, making the journey quite frightening. I recited my rosary while riding on the back of the motorcycle. Despite Fr. Charles's experience, we fell over once on that first day and many more times in the days to follow. As the saying goes, "That which cannot kill you, makes you stronger."

I can now manipulate and ride on

the sandy roads myself with few falls, while traveling to Masses. I've learned that the secret to riding on a sandy road is to reduce the air in the front tire and then speed up to cross sandy sections.

Celebrating the Eucharist in the people's local language

To God be the glory, and with my personal effort, I was able to concelebrate at French Masses after one month. In my second month, I celebrated my first Mass in the Sara dialect, common in southern Chad. The faithful were so happy to hear my improvement in reading the parts of Mass in their dialect. It was amusing for them to listen to my bad pronunciations—parishioners would often burst out laughing. I was not discouraged by the laughter, but kept on learning. Now I can celebrate Masses in French and Sarh languages well.

A newly ordained priest, Fr. Ngaryedji Charlot, and Fr. Noubarassem David were posted to Goundi after the last ordination. Presently, we officially have five priests working here, although, Fr. Nguetigal Bertin, the vicar general, resides more at the bishop's house.

The parish has 11 big sectors, which are outstations or station churches. The nearest of them is more than 20 km (12 miles) from the parish. There are many pastoral challenges that need to be tackled and we rely on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and our little human efforts to achieve them, because the Gospel is yet to penetrate certain practices and customs. We rely on the help of God.

Please keep praying for us and supporting us as we promote the Word of God in Chad Republic.

MSP PROJECTS

The Missionary Society of St. Paul, in the footsteps of her Patron, holds very dear to her heart the spreading of the Good News of Christ. We engage in primary evangelization, media apostolate, youth ministry, and school apostolate in reaching out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the salvific work of Christ. Two recent MSP projects were celebrated.

St. Paul's Primary School in Jikwoyi, Abuja

St. Paul's Nursery and Primary School in Jikwoyi, a satellite town in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, was officially inaugurated on October 24, 2015. The deplorable state of education in Nigeria is a matter of concern for the church. Although schools of this nature are not rare in the Jikwoyi locality, MSP intends to distinguish St. Paul's with a high standard of moral upbringing, skills acquisition, and affordability to the less privileged in society.

Inauguration ceremonies began with a holy Mass presided over by Superior General Very Rev. Fr. Victor Onwukeme, MSP. Also in attendance were esteemed associate missionaries, parents of the pupils, the CWO, and other pious organizations. Homilist, Fr. Patrick Etuk, MSP, apart from extolling the importance of Catholic education, encouraged the lay faithful to support the initiative of the church in this area by contributing to the scholarship scheme—which will make it possible for as many pupils as possible to have access to quality education.



Bishop Sanusi House

One year ago, a new house was commissioned and formally opened on November 30, 2015, for use at MSP headquarters, in Kutunku, Gwagwalada FCT. It accommodates MSP priests returning from missions and serves as a resource center to host seminars, conferences, and retreats.

The house was named after the late Bishop Anthony Sanusi. By naming the house after Bishop Sanusi, Vicar General Fr. Augustine Ogar, MSP, who presided over the inauguration ceremony, noted that MSP was honoring the bishop for his immense contributions to the MSP dream. He even named Bishop Sanusi as a founder of the Missionary of St. Paul, explaining that, without him providing a ready structure, the dream of the Nigerian bishops to establish a missionary congregation would not have come to pass.

The serene and luxuriant ambience provided in our headquarters in Kutunku offers a suitable place for reflection, study, prayers and relaxation.



NEWS CLIPS

Pope Francis Visits Africa

Pope Francis made his inaugural trip to Africa November 25-30, 2015, visiting Kenya, Uganda, and Central African Republic.

In a clear and symbolic image, the Pope maintained that “corruption is sweet like sugar, we like it and then we end up being diabetic or our country ends up being diabetic.”

He strongly advised that we should not develop the taste for that “sugar” which is called corruption. He called on the African society and her youth to shun corruption because it takes away the joy and peace of any nation.

Of much concern to the Pope’s heart is the plight of young people, the poor, and the vulnerable in the society. The need to care for and be sensitive to them was the underlying message and perhaps more urgent to the people. His gestures and words in this regard were so heart-touchingly parallel to what he said while in the U.S.—that “God weeps” when people are abused. The denial of the basic



necessities of life is an abuse on the human person. Throughout his tour he met with different classes of underprivileged and the youth. He described the misery of the poor as the social wounds inflicted by minorities who cling to power and wealth, who selfishly squander the wealth of the nation while the growing majority is denied the least of the

basic necessities of life.

The challenge for social transformation and inclusion of all was not limited to the political leaders. The Pope also called on religious leaders to “renew their missionary zeal, to take initiative in the face of so many situations of injustice, to be involved in their neighbors’ problems.”

Remembering Mrs. Sophina Onwukeme

Although their calling requires the Missionaries of St Paul to leave their biological families in order to unite with, and lead the family of God in various Christian communities, nevertheless their family bond always brings them to appreciate and celebrate the life and the love of family members who have been a significant part of their life’s journey.

Such was the case when Sophina Uchejionu Onwukeme, mother of MSP Superior General Very Rev. Victor Onwukeme, was laid to rest April 15, 2016. Her funeral was attended by three bishops, more than 150 priests, numerous religious men

and women, associate missionaries of St. Paul, and lay faithful from throughout Nigeria.

The funeral liturgy was held in Umuchu, Anambra State. Very Rev. Fr. Augustine Ogar, MSP in his condolence message, extolled the deep Catholic faith of Mrs. Onwukeme and the people of Umuchu who have generously given

their numerous sons and daughters to serve the church in different capacities as priests and religious.



MSP Appreciation Luncheon

by Rev. Aloysius Nzekwe, MSP

It was a bright and beautiful day on October 29, 2016—with joy and excitement in the air, as over 200 friends and Associate Missionaries of St. Paul gathered at St. Peter the Apostle church in Houston for the annual appreciation luncheon.

The event began with a thanksgiving mass presided over by Most Rev. George Sheltz, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. In his homily, Bishop Sheltz acknowledged with appreciation the great work the Missionaries of St. Paul are doing in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and in all the dioceses around the country where the MSP serve. He noted with some sense of humor how western missionaries, especially from Ireland, went to evangelize Africa and today Missionaries of St. Paul from Nigeria are on a return mission to the West—in addition to serving in ten countries of Africa. He congratulated those who would join the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul, thanked the associates and the friends of the MSP, and encouraged all to continue in the footsteps of St. Paul, the great apostle.

Six new members were solemnly admitted into the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul (AMSP) after the homily. AMSPs are lay missionaries who commit themselves to pray for and support the works of the



Left, top: MSP clergy pose on the steps of St. Peter the Apostle Church with Auxiliary Bishop George A. Sheltz, who celebrated Mass for the MSP Appreciation event. Left middle: In a solemn admission ceremony, six new laypersons join the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul. Lower left: Two hundred guests, clergy, and associates took part in a meal, program, and auction in the school gymnasium.

Missionaries of St. Paul through financial and other material contributions.

A reception in the parish gymnasium immediately followed Mass. Rev. Christian Unachukwu, MSP, who has been on mission in South Sudan for more than six years, shared his mission experience. In a detailed, captivating description, he helped the audience visualize the experience of the missionaries and their encounters with the local culture. The difficulty of gaining the trust and acceptance of the people, who have been traumatized by many years of war and insecurity, and the reward of breaking through with the liberating and transforming power of the Gospel were highlights of Fr. Christian's presentation.

As difficult and challenging as his experience must have been, it was very clear that it was most rewarding and fulfilling for Fr. Christian, being able to bring positive changes in the lives of the locals by providing basic amenities such as water, medication and education. Through educational empowerment, the Missionaries of St. Paul have made a huge impact in the lives of so many; they are greatly loved by the people in that area of South Sudan, he remarked.

The Regional Superior Rev. George Okeahialam, MSP, acknowledged and thanked all for their love and support for MSP. He especially expressed appreciation to the directors of the Mission Development office, Frs. Aloy

Nzekwe and Evaristus Chukwu, MSP, for their great commitment to the Mission office.

Two awards were presented. The Fisher of Men award was presented to an MSP priest for his commitment to God, the church, and MSP—especially through the promotion of AMSP activities in his ministry. Rev. Felix Osasona, MSP, received this award for his outstanding role in this regard.

An Associate Missionary of St. Paul equally received the Shield of Faith award for outstanding contributions and active participation in group activities. This award was given to Ms. Beatrice Cunningham.

The great fellowship, mission enlightenment, and renewal of commitment characterizing the day's events did not come to end without the traditional recitation of the Hail Mary for the missions—prayed in various languages by those gathered, for each MSP mission.

Though it was a dinner to appreciate the friends of MSP, our friends once again showed their passion for the works of the MSP through generous donations that totaled \$8,372, after expenses. This money will help fund a proposed fresh water well in South Sudan, estimated to cost \$15,000.



Fr. Felix Osasona, MSP, right, received the Fisher of Men award. Ms. Beatrice Cunningham, far right, received the Shield of Faith award.

Above right: Clergy, religious, and AMSP members enjoyed the festivities.

75th Anniversary

ST. PETER THE APOSTLE CHURCH

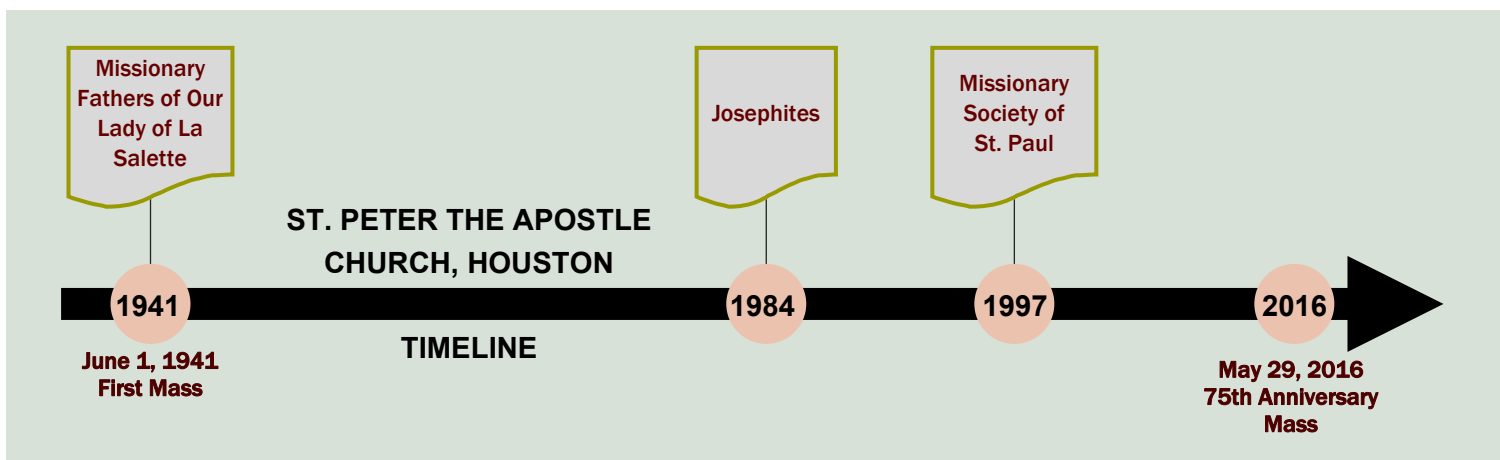


St. Peter the Apostle Church celebrated its 75th anniversary on May 29, 2016, with the theme: “We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” This verse, from Philippians 4:13, truly represents our 75 years of faith journey. Our founding members left a legacy of faith for us, and through the strength that Christ endows us daily in the celebration of the Word and the Eucharist; we have continued to uphold that legacy in our worship of God and service to our community.

The 75th anniversary of our church was a great occasion of joy for parishioners, families, and friends as we collectively praised God in thanksgiving for all the gracious deeds He has worked in our lives. It was also a celebration of spiritual renewal.

In 1941, Bishop Christopher Byrne of Galveston-Houston Diocese established St. Peter the Apostle Church and placed it under the care of the Missionary Fathers of La Salette (MS). Since no structure existed at the inception of the parish, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word gave use of their chapel at St. Anthony’s Home for the Aged as the temporary place of worship. The first Mass

Top: The faithful gather to commemorate the 75th anniversary of St. Peter the Apostle Church. Left (above): Rev. Faustinus Okeyikam, MSP, pastor, in procession with Monsignor Bill Young and His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo. Lower left and p. 22: Altar servers assist during the anniversary Mass.



offered for the people of St. Peter's was on June 1, 1941.

Over these past 75 years, St. Peter the Apostle Church has been served by three different religious order of priests. Following the MS order, the Josephites began parish oversight in 1984; and in 1997, priests of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul assumed pastoral administration.

Milestone Events

To prepare for this milestone, St. Peter parishioners held numerous celebrations and undertook many works.

- Major church renovations and remodeling completed, March 2016.
- A special anniversary prayer said every Sunday at Mass for a year.
- Gospel Extravaganza, May 31, 2015—other church choirs took part in a joyful day with songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.
- Jazz dance night, Nov. 21, 2015.
- St. Peter the Apostle Alumni Meet and Greet dinner.
- Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 11, 2015—honoring our bilingual nature, we prayed and entrusted our forthcoming 75th anniversary to God through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- 75th Anniversary Banquet, May 21, 2016, Double Tree Hotel by Hilton, Hobby Airport. Rev. Phil "Skip" Negley, MS; was guest speaker, while Rev. George Okeahialam, MSP; gave the reflection. Houston Mayor, the Honorable Sylvester Turner,

declared May 21 as St. Peter the Apostle Day in Houston.

Anniversary Celebration

Daniel Cardinal DiNardo celebrated the Anniversary Mass on May 29, 2016, with several clergy, deacons, religious, alumni, parishioners, and friends participating. Cardinal DiNardo centered his homily on the importance of the Body of Christ, on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It is the Body of Christ more than any other thing that keeps us together as one and as Christians, he stressed.

The Cardinal acknowledged the Missionaries of La Salette who started the parish; then the Josephites and the Missionary Society of St. Paul, who

continued the mission in succession. He brought a 1941 *Houston Chronicle* with an article on the establishment of St. Peter the Apostle church.

Following Mass, all proceeded to the gym for brunch amidst music and photos and videos that captured important events in church history. After 75 years of faith journey with prayer, patience, commitment, pride, and thanksgiving to God for His grace and boundless love, we can look back at the growth and progress of St. Peter the Apostle Church—and see God's hand at work among His people. We have come this far not by our own power, but because "we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us." (Philippians 4: 13)

by Rev. Faustinus Okeyikam, MSP, Pastor



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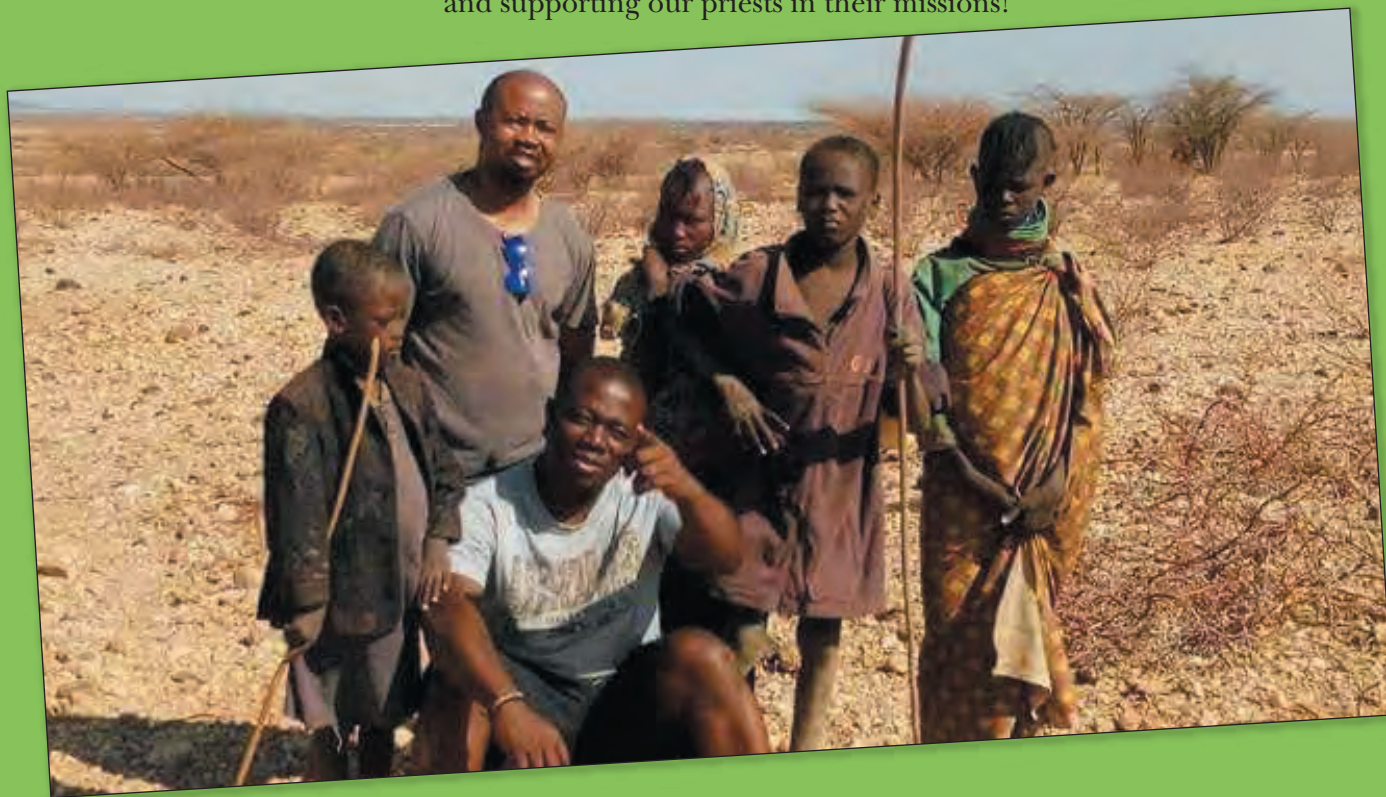
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