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*Sharing the Gospel in South Sudan*



Happy Anniversary MSP!  
**40**

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**Cover**

*Fr. Kizito Anyanwu, MSP Ministers the  
War-Torn People of South Sudan*

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

**Keep Calm: Life Begins at 40**



The notion that “Life begins at 40” is a 20th Century one; prior to that it was more accurate to say, “Death begins at 40” as most people didn't live much beyond that age in medieval England. By the 1930s, many, in western societies at least, could expect a decent spell of reasonably affluent retirement, free from work and the responsibilities of childcare, which prolonged life expectancy. In 1932, the American psychologist Walter Pitkin published the self-help book, *Life Begins at Forty*. Pitkin is often credited with coining the phrase when he stated confidently: “Life begins at forty. This is the revolutionary outcome of our new era. Today it is half a truth. Tomorrow it will be an axiom.”

The Missionary Society of St Paul of Nigeria (MSP) was just an idea in the mind of its founder, Dominic Cardinal Ekandem—an idea that took some years to mature and with the decision of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, finally saw the light of day in 1977. Today it is a reality to be celebrated, having over 250 priests working in different mission territories all over the world, with three of its members now bishops, and with numerous laypersons as Associate Missionaries (AMSPs) as part of the large missionary family. In this edition, our superior general, Very Rev. Fr. Victor Onwukeme, MSP, presents by introspection, the need for MSP as a missionary institute to celebrate and embrace our challenges.

Our Diaconate Ordination and the Open and Thanksgiving Day celebrated in January 2017 are featured—they are among a series of events to mark this great feat of our missionary family at 40.

The Christian faith is a precious gift to be shared with all peoples whether in joy, pain, or challenging circumstances of life, just like the early missionaries did when they came all the way from Europe and America to Africa. The presence of MSP priests in Canada and in the war-torn land of South Sudan, as shared in the stories of Frs. Idara Otu, MSP and Kizito Anyanwu, MSP in this issue, testify to this witness of faith in an attempt to continue the generosity of the early missionaries to the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Similarly, our 25 years in South Africa and Fr. Joseph Idikaro’s desire to help a shepherd boy learn to read in Kenya, speak to the good we do.

All the foregoing resonates with the initial intention of our founder, Cardinal Dominic Ekandem (1917-1995), who believed that the Catholic Church in Nigeria, by virtue of its blossoming vocations and witness of faith, had a mission mandate to evangelize Africa and wherever there is a pastoral need for priests.

*by Fr. Dan Ifiok Udofia, MSP  
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*This United States edition of Ambassador magazine, published in July 2017, includes excerpts from two previous Nigerian issues. Fr. Udofia's editor's notes were modified to reflect the stories selected for this compilation.*



P. 5—The trials and triumphs of mission work in South Sudan



P. 11—Houston AMSP raised \$15,000 for MSP missions



P. 16—Open & Thanksgiving Day celebration



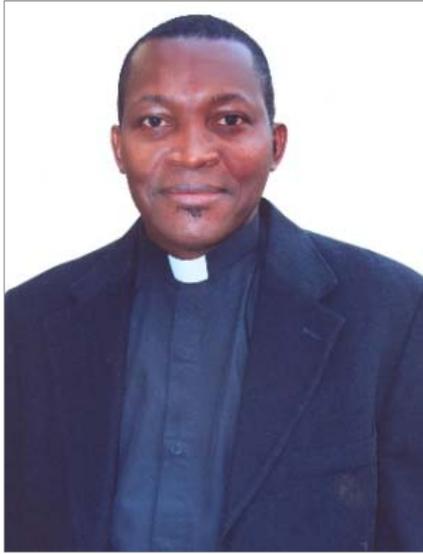
P. 18—Bishop Thévenot formally dedicates a new MSP Canada Mission

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## MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

### MSP @ 40: Celebrating God's Wonders while Facing the Challenges Ahead



by Very Rev. Fr. Victor  
Onwukeme, MSP

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*“As you proceed to your mission field as Ambassadors of Christ, bear in mind that as Nigerians, you are also ambassadors of your fatherland. Some Nigerians give bad name to our country. However, by your Christian and priestly activities you will rebrand Nigeria and bring good name and honor to your country.”*

*—Dominic Cardinal  
Ekandem to 11 MSP priests  
ordained on June 28, 1986.*

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There is an adage which, when negatively expressed, says, “A fool at 40 is a fool forever.” When expressed positively, it says, “Life begins at 40.” The implication is that, at the age of 40, one has come of age.

Moses stayed on the Mountain of God 40 days (Exod 24:18; 34:28), at the end of which he received the Ten Commandments. The spies were in the land for 40 days (Num 13:25). Elijah traveled 40 days before he reached the cave where he had his vision (1 Kgs 19:8). Nineveh was given 40 days to repent or face destruction (Jonah 3:4). Most importantly, prior to undertaking his ministry, Our Blessed Lord spent 40 days in the wilderness, praying and fasting (Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2). *Exegetically, 40 days does not need to be understood literally.* “Forty days” biblically speaking denotes a considerable amount of time, fullness of time, enough time.

The MSP as a missionary institute, at the age of 40, has come of age, a time to reflect on things we need to celebrate and challenges we need to embrace. In Mark 4:30, Jesus says:

*“With what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest shrub of all and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

When Jesus spoke of the mustard seed, it would seem as if He had MSP in mind. When MSP was conceived many years ago, it looked like an impossible dream and when it started, it was in a very humble way. It took off on January 23, 1977 at the former St. Mark's Teachers' Training College in Iperu-Remo, Ogun State—donated by then Bishop of Ijebu-Ode, Most Rev.

Dr. Saliu Sanusi of Blessed Memory.

At the first priestly ordination on June 22, 1985, there was only one candidate, Very Rev. Dr. John Osom, MSP (now working in Montana, U.S.). Since 1985, MSP has seen an unbroken succession of priestly ordinations every year.

In 40 years, 283 MSP priests have been ordained and we now work in 19 countries around the world. This is marvelous in our eyes and it is wonderful to see! In the year 2008, Archbishop Felix Alaba Job, then Archbishop of Ibadan and President of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), described MSP as the most successful venture of CBCN.

The idea was nursed for many years by Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, presented to CBCN many times, and eventually approved and adopted by the Conference during their plenary session in Kaduna on Sept. 15, 1976.

On June 28, 1986, eleven were ordained priests at Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Garki, Abuja. When the eleven were being sent on mission, Dominic Cardinal Ekandem told them: “As you proceed to your mission field as Ambassadors of Christ, bear in mind that as Nigerians, you are also ambassadors of your fatherland. Some Nigerians give bad name to our country. However, by your Christian and priestly activities, you will rebrand Nigeria and bring good name and honor to your country” (cf. Cosmas Nwosuh 358).

Today MSP priests are scattered all over the world, carrying out missionary work as well as charity work to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. Our missionaries move into virgin lands—and even in the midst of war and poverty, they continue to preach Jesus crucified. This is happening in South Sudan and among the Turkana people of Kenya. MSP priests, led by

# 40 Years Young—MSP Milestones

the zeal for God's house, did not abandon their calling even in the midst of the Ebola crisis in Liberia. They follow the footsteps of our Patron, Saint Paul, who said: "Preach the Gospel in season and out of season." (2 Tim 4:2).

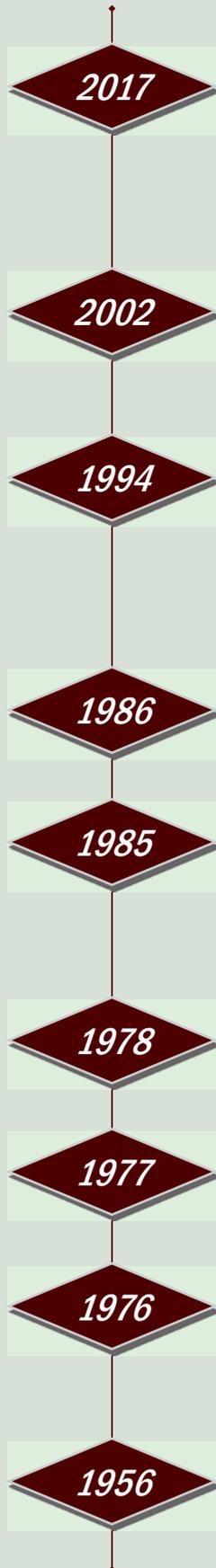
Our missionaries establish vocational centers to enable people to learn arts and trade, and in this way, acquire a means of livelihood. This is taking place in Malawi. MSP priests take up moribund parishes and bring them back to life—in the United States and Europe, MSP priests have brought dying parishes back to life. For being able to do the above and much more, all glory goes to God—"In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Apart from the priests, we have Associate Missionaries of St Paul (AMSP), a lay group of missionaries who are interested and enthusiastic about the work of mission. These lay missionaries are engaged in training seminarians, supporting priests spiritually, materially, and otherwise. We remain ever grateful to them. The challenge ahead is to bring some of them with us to the missions. Plans are underway to make this happen.

Another challenge facing us is to attain pontifical status. Yet another challenge is to establish solid financial income sources for the society, to assure adequate funding for the training of our seminarians, the care of our priests (especially, elderly and sick) and the maintenance of our difficult missions.

Biblically, MSP has reached the age of maturity. This noble project is borne of God's inspiration. Gamaliel noted that if something is from God, it will last. MSP has stood the test of time and so it has become a project that is meant to endure because it is inspired by God. May God continue to give success to the work of our hands through Christ our Lord!

Happy 40th anniversary! Ad multos annos!



MSP formally celebrates our 40th anniversary. Since 1977, 283 missionaries have been ordained. We now work in 19 mission countries around the world.

The Missionary of St. Paul celebrated our Silver Jubilee.

Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith approved the canonical status of the MSP.

11 MSP priests ordained in Abuja on June 28, 1986. First foreign missions to Cameroon, Liberia, and the U.S.

First priestly ordination of Very Rev. Dr. John Osom, MSP, on June 22, 1985.

Missionary Society of St. Paul erected as a Pious Union with support of Nigerian Catholic Bishops.

Missionary Society of St. Paul seminary officially opens at a former teacher's training college in Iperu-Remo, Ogun State.

Cardinal Ekandem shared his vision of Nigerian Missionaries with Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).

Cardinal Dominic Ekandem (1917-95) writes to Apostolic Delegate, the Most Rev. J. R. Knox, appealing for a common Majority Seminary for Nigerian students.

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Fr. Kizito Mario Chukwunonso

*Anyamwu, MSP, was inspired to the priesthood in his youth by a country priest who was dedicated to the poor and had an unflinching love for the people. When it came time for his own mission assignment to South Sudan, he knew it would be difficult, but welcomed the news with joy.*

*Fr. Kizito shares the challenges and triumphs of his mission.*

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## *Wherever the Path Leads*

### **Ministering to the War-Torn People of South Sudan**

#### **The traumas of war**

- *First Sudanese Civil War, 1955-1972*
- *Sharia law was imposed by the mostly Arabic Muslim North on the Christian and Animist South.*
- *The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of southern Sudan revolted against marginalization by the Central Sudanese government based in Khartoum, Sudan.*
- *The 22-year Second Sudanese Civil War, 1980-2005, is the longest war on record.*
  - \* *2 million people died of warfare, famine, and disease.*
  - \* *4 million people were displaced.*
  - \* *Civilian deaths were one of the highest since World War II, with slavery, mass killings (genocide), and abandonment.*
- *Peace agreement reached in 2005.*
- *South Sudan independence in 2011.*
- *Civil war in South Sudan erupted in 2013 with a rebel group (mostly Nuer Tribe) fighting the mostly Dinka government.*
- *Cease-fire and peace agreement reached in 2015.*

**O**ur journey to South Sudan was a difficult one. I left with Fr. Bonaventure Iyogun, MSP on September 13, 2014, with plans to fly there via Kenya. Fr. Chris Unachukwu, MSP, was waiting to receive us in Kenya, where we learned that the South Sudanese government had closed its borders to West Africans because of the Ebola virus outbreak. The only way to make our journey was by road through western Kenya. We eventually arrived in South Sudan on September 18, 2014 after a five-day journey.

#### **Many Tribes, Many Languages**

In South Sudan, I work in the Catholic Diocese of Torit in Eastern Equatoria state, home of the MSP mission. We stay in Torit, but our work extends to many chapels (outstations) attached to the main parish, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.

Though predominantly populated

by the Lotuko tribe, as the capital of Eastern Equatoria, Torit is home to many other tribes—the Acholeys, Taposas, Madis, Beris, Lokwayas, Baris, Bageris, and Dinkas. You also find Kenyan, Ugandan, and Arab businessmen from Sudan. Most inhabitants of the villages where the chapels are located are Lotukos.

Language is a complex situation. After her independence in 2011, South Sudan adopted English as the official language—as a way of rejecting anything Arabic after years of oppression. Citizens are still learning English. To facilitate communication between this conglomeration of tribes and peoples, is the local (pidgin) Arabic, the most common language spoken in the streets, markets, and wherever people of different tribes gather. Those who use classical Arabic are the Arabs from Sudan, the educated class under the Khartoum government, and

returnees who had migrated to Khartoum during the 22 years of war with the Sudan.

Since the Lotukos are the majority language and the villages are Lotuko, it became sacrosanct to learn Lotuko and classical Arabic for easy communication and celebration of the Sacraments. In our parish, we celebrate three masses every Sunday in Lotuko, Arabic, and English. Indeed, language was a very big barrier during the earliest stages of my mission in South Sudan. We made use of translators and interpreters, and to the glory of God, huge progress has been made.

### **Our Hope for Peace**

The war I met in South Sudan in 2014 was a civil war between mostly Nuer rebels fighting the government, who are mostly of the Dinka tribe. With the peace deal of August 27, 2015, and the following cease-fire, we hope that the war is in fact, ended.

Besides the major war between the government and the rebels are inter-tribal wars and incessant extrajudicial killings, caused by cattle rustling, the abduction of children, land disputes, the killing of acclaimed rainmakers because of the present drought, etc. Here, war is endemic. There is no time when we do not have inter-tribal and inter-community conflicts and wars, with the major reason being cow rustling. A whole community can be wiped out for the theft of one cow, impressing on us the value placed on cows over human lives. In many occasions we are invited to go with government officials to mediate between warring communities and tribes, and to bless the graves of those killed, especially women and children who are worst hit during the wars.

### **Illiteracy & Early Marriage**

South Sudan is culturally rich, though the wars have scattered, spited, and in some cases, almost wiped out whole tribes, villages, clans, and kindred. There remain many crude cultural traditions and practices

that need civilization, evangelization, and purification. Here, polygamy is normal. A man can have as many as five to ten wives, some teenagers. A man of 70 can marry a girl of 13.

The women/wives are transferred to brothers and sons of the deceased husband, since the fat dowries of goats, sheep, cattle, and money paid on the head of a woman must be returned if the woman were to leave. Here, most men pay dowries until they die. Having a girl child is a huge celebration for the family because she is an asset who will fetch them cows, goats, and sheep in the future. Unfortunately, the poor girl is like a possession to be disposed—left at the mercy of the man, who does whatever he likes.

Illiteracy and early marriage are major challenges. One of my earliest experiences was seeing a little girl of about 13 carrying a crying baby in the church. I was about to ask her to take the baby to the mother, but to my surprise, the girl started breastfeeding the baby. When I inquired, I was told she was the infant's mother.

Early marriage is a very serious issue. Vaginal fistula and diseases associated with early pregnancy are quite common. In the villages, if you are unmarried and older than 18, they will call you "Otoduok," or spinster, a very derogatory title. Educated females bring higher dowries, but it is not something to be envied. The belief is that for a woman to have healthy kids, early marriage is a "conditio sine qua non."

### **Existential Challenges**

The South Sudan of my experience is poor, with an inadequate food supply. The country depends on relief services from NGOs and international relief agencies. It is very backward in development and social amenities. Poor roads (or in some cases, no roads) make it hard to access villages. People suffer from diseases like cholera, malaria, measles, poxes, and fistula and the country lacks sophisticated health care facilities.

Clinics are scarce, often far from the villages, and overcrowded.

Few schools exist in the villages. Where found, they are insufficient, inadequate, overcrowded, and not conducive to learning, not to mention lacking sufficient qualified teachers. Most people cannot afford school fees, even at the most basic level. There is a high illiteracy rate.

Masses and prayers are conducted under trees in open spaces or under make-shift booths. The people are very good, happy, and welcoming, but their existential situation is appalling. Evangelization is still at its primary level and the government is quite corrupt.

### **The Gospel Brings Joy & Hope**

In the midst of all these hardships, the people we work with are truly excited by our presence. The faith brought by the Italian Comboni Missionaries could not take deep root during the wars. The people we serve reject anything Muslim and welcome the Catholic faith with open arms. They still need serious and radical evangelization, which will involve many resources and personnel.

It is not enough to throw an individual missionary here and tell him, "It is a hard mission—go and struggle to survive."

This leaves the evangelist struggling for his survival while wading through forests, deserts, and rivers, breaking through rocks and mountains to reach difficult frontiers and margins, which is the major issue of the indigenous priests.

The people have almost nothing materially to give; they look to us always for support. We do try to inculcate in them the spirit of generosity by teaching them to contribute from the little they have.

In the midst of the existential challenges and traumas are the souls that search for answers—the people who need reassurance that God is still with them—the people who need to be told that God is part of their



*Continued from page 6*

history, despite the ugly conditions of living. They are deeply spiritual. My first approach is to meet them where they are, to identify with them as completely one of them, sharing their lives and stories.

We drive hours through terrible roads, get stuck, and spend days on the road to reach our people. We pitch our mosquito tents and stay in camps and villages. Our only tools are the Word of God and our faith, which we have come to share. These do not fully address their hardships, but are essential and at the center of all. The person who knows God is almost liberated.

Once I drove hours to a remote and isolated village called Imokoro, which had not seen a priest for years. Almost naked without proper dresses, they were so excited to meet me. They sang a song, which translated, means, “Satan, Satan you can now leave us alone; you have deceived us for a long time, but now God has given us a priest with a good heart.”

Of course Satan never deceived them, because although they did not gather in the church every Sunday, God kept the faith alive in their hearts until I came. They gathered at

Christmas and New Year’s to pray and celebrate, even without a priest.

### **Easter: A Period of Sacramental Rebirth**

In Eastern Equatoria, Easter does not include the color and elaborate celebrations of Christmas and New Year’s, with the exception of our normal ecclesiastical celebrations. What is outstanding about Easter is that the Comboni Missionaries who first brought Christianity to this region exalted Baptism as the most important sacrament. Thus, baptisms, even infant baptisms, are done in great numbers—making Easter an exciting and important time. Many believers are baptized during the Easter vigil.

Passion Sunday also marks an elaborate celebration with large crowds. A donkey is typically provided for the priest to ride during a long procession that includes traditional singing and dancing. Other Catholic Lenten and Easter rituals still require catechesis—Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and other aspects of the Easter vigil are hard to hold in the villages without a priest present. Though, with the excitement and enthusiasm I see, I know with time we will get there.

### **Christmas & New Year’s**

Christmas is celebrated with style and color. The roads are cleared, new huts are built, and old huts are smeared with fresh mud and designed with drawings, writings, and paintings. Within their means, Christians try to attain new clothes and cook good food. Many people travel to different villages and communities to celebrate with their families. During Christmas, I travel from one chapel to another for the vigil, midnight, dawn, and Christmas day masses.

Many people turn out, lighting big fires to dispel darkness and wild animals. There is always a lot of singing and dancing. I show movies about the birth and life of Christ in the Lotuko language. At the midnight mass and on Christmas day, everyone comes to church. Christmas is the day you will see men in church, who on normal Sundays will be under the trees, drinking at the village squares, unless there has been rain to go digging for cultivation.

On my first Christmas day, I was startled to see most people who came to church dirty and shabby. I wondered if they came straight from their farms. But now, things have changed. On Christmas day, all came to church in their new clothing and suits. Celebrations of singing and dancing continue after the Mass, including a community meal that we all must partake.

The meal is beautifully communitarian. The food is served on big trays for each group of men, women, and children. Each group sits around the meal and eats with their hands. The drink, Kwetee, is made from sorghum and served in big jugs, which each person sips and passes on until it comes back. Not to share in this meal means you are an enemy. It is like refusing a handshake from a South Sudanese. It means a total rejection and makes you an arch-enemy.

The New Year’s celebration is the same as Christmas. They call it

Wahid-Wahid. Wahid means “one” in Arabic. So Wahid-Wahid is a way of saying “the first day of the first month of the year” It is a day of big celebration and solemnity.

In one of my first years here, on the Sunday within the Christmas octave, worshippers came to church shabbily dressed again. I was surprised and asked them, “Where are those beautiful Christmas clothes?”

They laughed and said, “Father does not understand—we are keeping them for Wahid-Wahid.” And on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, it was the same long and colorful celebration.

### **The Pontifical Missionary Childhood Association**

Apart from the liturgical celebrations, catechesis, and physical church development, we motivate people to support themselves and contribute to the development of the church. I have gathered children and young people to form the Pontifical Missionary Childhood Association. I reach out to the youth to understand their life situations and challenges. Through this association, I have been able to send many children to school, and pay their school fees.

Education is critical for our children and a worthwhile, though long-term investment. Because South Sudan is educationally disadvantaged, any child who attends school is hope for a better tomorrow. My goal is to make a major investment in education.

Through the association, too, I keep youth close to the church, have formed a good choir, and discourage early marriage—especially for the girls. The children help evangelize their



*Fr. Kizito administers the sacraments to his flock. Above, he raises the monstrance during the Liturgy of the Eucharist at Mass. Left, he hears the confession of a faithful member. To be effective, Fr. Kizito said South Sudanese missionaries must have funding to deliver basic necessities to the impoverished people they teach and serve.*

peers by living exemplary lives and through evangelical outreach. We have made a lot of progress.

Since we live in the state capital of Torit, I have also solicited government support, though not much progress has been made for a myriad of reasons. We considered a farm project, but it is not possible because of the drought. The youth are also helping to build churches, while older people are beginning to contribute, as little as it may be. It is a way of making them see the church as their own.

### **Missionaries Must Bring Purses & Haversacks**

South Sudan is a very young country that just gained her independence in 2011. Even after that, her people still have not known peace. South Sudan remains one of Africa’s least developed countries. Everything is underdeveloped, from health care to education, agriculture, and physical

infrastructure like accessible roads and potable water.

Evangelization is still at its most primary level. If anything is reaching those at the grassroots, it is through international aid agencies and NGOs. For the work of evangelization to really be effective here, it will not be enough to send missionaries without purses and haversacks; it is not enough to throw them to the mission and leave them struggling to survive, because they live with people struggling to survive. The diocese cannot even take care of her own priests.

So, we need your support financially, materially, and spiritually for our missionary engagement here to be holistic. We have to include education, health care provisions, youth empowerment, and community-based development as part of our apostolate. It is only then that we can say we have a flourishing mission in South Sudan.

# Joseph, the Shepherd Boy



by Fr. Joseph Ibiwoye, MSP

I met young Joseph within two weeks of my arrival in northern Kenya. It was one of those days I needed to communicate with the “outside world,” so I and Fr. Ben Unwana, MSP, took a walk to an area where we can access minimal network signal strength, about 4 kilometers from the rectory. Upon reaching our destination, we met a group of young nomads and their goats. Among them was Joseph, a boy of about 8 or 9 years old.

I spontaneously said, “Good morning. How are you?” not expecting any response, but out of a mere desire to make an acquaintance. To my greatest surprise, one of the lads responded, “Fine, thank you!”

Why the surprise? First, since our arrival in this desert land, of all the kids we had encountered, this tattered-looking shepherd boy was the first to say any word to us in English. Secondly, my parish, St. Stephen Losajiat, is located in the desert. It is isolated and deprived of standard social amenities.

I further asked their names, thinking perhaps others too could understand me, and probably Joseph was just being forward.

Again, he alone answered, “My name is Joseph,” after which he turned to the other kids and said, “Ngae ekiro kon?”

That is, “What is your name?” in the Turkana language. Apparently, Joseph was the interpreter. He was the only one among these lads who understood me, and cheerfully he tried to interpret what I said to them. With Joseph’s help, the others also told me their names.

Although I hoped to converse further with Joseph, unfortunately, that was as much as he could speak in English. But these young shepherds stood with us while we made several calls, observing in amusement as we struggled to locate signal strength on our mobile phones, climbing every available stone and raising our hands as high as we could reach. Before we left, we took snapshots with Joseph and his friends, who were so happy to pose with us for the photographs.

This brief encounter left a deep impression on me. I thought how lovely it would be to give Joseph an opportunity for formal education. He became a regular companion whenever I went to my “signal spot.” Usually covered with dust, with cloth



*Fr. Joseph Ibiwoye, MSP, and his young friend, Joseph. His parents declined an offer to school the lad, saying he is needed to tend their goat herd—indicative of traditional attitudes of Turkana people toward education.*

tied around his waist and across his shoulder, Joseph would wait patiently while I made my calls, keenly observing what I was doing.

Over time, Joseph became my friend. I noticed in him a strong desire to engage in conversation, but his English was limited. After learning a new Turkana word in my language

class, I would speak it; Joseph would smile and pronounce it correctly. I considered him my secret language tutor.

Our regular meetings increased my eagerness and desire to send Joseph to school. I needed to know his place and parents—within two weeks of my search, I discovered my young nomad friend's roots.

I visited his family hut with my catechist, with the news that the parish was ready to take up the responsibilities of Joseph's education. His parents' response was an unbelievable, "No!"

They explained that if Joseph would attend school, there would be no one to take care of their family goats. Indeed, it was a disappointing and heartbreaking response.

This experience fueled my desire to research the general attitude of the traditional Turkana community toward Western education. I was amazed to find that people would have such a negative attitude toward Western education in the 21st Century, when childhood education is given a central place in many countries' constitutions, including Kenya's.

Caring for animals takes a place of pride among Turkana people. In their opinion, one can only talk of sending a child to school if proper arrangements have been made on how the herds will be pastured. Thus, if one is blessed with three children, the smartest is saddled with the responsibility of taking care of the animals. And if the herd is large, the two smartest and most loved kids would tend the herd, while the "fragile" child is sent to school.

I still meet Joseph at our usual spot, and it hurts me so much that I cannot help this young boy to acquire a formal education. I hope some day the appetite for Western education among the Turkana will improve, so that Joseph and other children like him can go to school.

## *A Prayer for Priests*

*Gracious and loving God, we thank you for  
the gift of our priests. Through them,  
we experience your presence in the sacraments.  
Help our priests to be strong in their vocation.*

*Set their souls on fire with love for your people.  
Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength  
they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.  
Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.*

*Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.  
Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.*

*Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.*

*We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns as our eternal priest.*

*Amen.*



# Walk 4 the Mission



Snapshots by Janell Nelson and Anne Peterson. Related story on Page 13.



April 22, 2017

Tom Bass  
Regional Park  
Houston, Texas



# Walk 4 the Mission Continues to Grow

*“Ambassadors!”* was the rallying cry at the eighth annual AMSP Walk 4 the Mission held at Houston’s Tom Bass Regional Park on April 22, 2017.

“For Christ!” came the resounding reply from more than 120 participants who came out to walk, contribute, and support MSP initiatives for underprivileged children in Nigeria.

U.S. Mission Development Director, Fr. Aloysius Nzekwe, MSP, told the crowd that almost \$15,000 was raised by walkers, sponsors, and friends. One of the organizers, Lendy Zink, said this year’s funds will help purchase books and other supplies for Nigerian schoolchildren.

It was the eighth annual walkathon sponsored by the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul (AMSP) in Houston. A few ambitious runners joined brisk and leisurely walkers in one, two, or three laps along a one-mile path around a tranquil lake. Volunteers offering to forego the walk grilled hot dogs and tallied donations in preparation for an awards program that followed.

St. Peter the Apostle Church members took home most of the hardware in friendly competitions for the most funds raised and the greatest turnout. St. Francis de Sales Parish claimed the award for the most registered participants. Other parishes and friends were recognized for sponsoring the event. Carol Tyson said 400 t-shirts were distributed to walkers and donors.

Lois Coleman founded the local AMSP Walk 4 the Mission. She and two fellow AMSP members, Myriam Marin and Beatrice Cunningham, spent three weeks in Nigeria in 2008 visiting MSP sites.

“I was really touched by those children,” Lois said. “They just wanted to learn. They wanted uniforms and shoes to put on their feet to go to school. They didn’t want material things for themselves.” Despite their poverty, the Nigerian children had a love of sharing with others.

Upon returning home, Lois first started a clothing and school supply drive at her own parish, St. Philip Neri. She then suggested that the Houston AMSP host a walkathon. She, Beatrice, and Myriam shared photos and gave presentations on what they had learned in Nigeria. Support grew and the walkathon was born.

This year’s walkers had differing reasons for participating. Jayla, 14, and Tiarra, 14, are both members of St. Anne de Beaupre Parish who came with a relative. Virgie Ricardo of St. Peter the Apostle Church said the best part of the walkathon is the camaraderie and meeting people from other parishes where MSP priests work. John Bauer and Maria Rojas of St. Francis de Sales Parish came to support their new parochial vicar, Fr. Christian Unachukwu, MSP. Both have been truly impressed with Fr. Chris.

John said that Fr. Chris has become especially involved with the Hispanic community—attending committee meetings and frequently offering Spanish Masses. St. Francis de Sales holds two Spanish Masses every weekend with standing-room-only attendance. Fr. Chris speaks ten different languages.

“He gives beautiful homilies and goes right to the point of the Gospel readings,” Maria said.

While in Nigeria, the three Texans witnessed the ordination of ten MSP priests. In the years since, Lois said she has met most of those priests when they visited or were assigned to the U.S. One in particular thanked her effusively for the local fundraising. “It was a blessing to hear firsthand that the money and donations we sent were appreciated and used,” she said.

*by Anne Farrell Peterson*



*Above, left to right: AMSP members Myriam Marin, Beatrice Cunningham, and Lois Coleman visited Nigeria in 2008. Upon their return, they discussed how to help needy children in Africa. Lois suggested a walkathon. The rest is history.*



# Celebrating 25 Years of MSP in South Africa

by Fr. Elijah Ofu, MSP, and  
Fr. Enimabasi Macjoe, MSP

It was probably a hazy sky and dusty harmattan\* (winter) day, toward the end of 1992 when three young missionaries (Frs. Benjamin Anasiudu, MSP; Anthony Ita Bassey, MSP; and Pius Femi Oladele, MSP), who were ordained six months earlier, moved like Abraham in obedience to the voice of God to a land God would show them. Unsure of what awaited them, they bid farewell to their beloved homeland Nigeria, their families, and their friends. Their decision to embark on such an odyssey could best be described as a leap of faith.

The anxiety of starting a new mission in a land that for many years, had been closed to the rest of the world because of apartheid, was no doubt in the hearts of these young missionaries. Contrary to their fears, on arrival, the land of South Africa received them, the people of South Africa loved them, and the Church in the Diocese of Bethlehem appreciated them. From that humble but promising beginning and with the subsequent arrival of other priests, the MSP mission in South Africa expanded to the Dioceses of Kroonstad and Kimberley. The seed planted by those forebearers has lived on as our apostolate has spread further afield to the Archdioceses of Johannesburg and Pretoria.

This year marks 25 years since we first set sail for South Africa. To mark the occasion, on February 11-12, all roads led to Ficksburg, selected due to its historical significance in the diocese where we first served, and as a parish where we have served for 19 years. Most of our missionaries to South Africa have set foot or passed through this small, yet important town.

The celebration kicked off with a mass of remembrance, celebrated for the repose of the souls of MSP Frs.



Current MSP priests serving in South Africa gathered to mark the MSP's Silver Jubilee in that nation. They include, left to right, Frs. Emmanuel Agbor, Enimabasi Macjoe Akpan, Elijah Bassey Ofu, Kris Louis Aneke, David-Maria Okonkwo, Johnson Ugwu, Godwin Asatomegbe Garuba, and Valentine Iheahcho.

Benjamin Anasiudu, Anthony Ita Bassey, and Stephen Achi—led by Most Rev. Dr. Anselm Umoren, MSP.

Mission Superior, Fr. Kris Aneke, MSP, then led all to the spot where Fr. Benjamin Anasiudu, MSP—one of the pioneer missionaries—died in a car accident along Ficksburg-Fouriesburg Road.

In a jubilee gala dinner that evening at a local auditorium, Fr. Dr. Edward Obi, MSP, gave his keynote address, “Being a missionary in the new world order: Re-instating universal access to creation and all creatures.”

Parishioners from all parishes where MSPs now work shared experiences of living and working with us. Their testimonies were overwhelmingly positive. Other highlights were songs, poetry, and dance performances by Ficksburg youth and music by Fr. Richard Filima, SPS.

A multitude of parishioners assembled the following day in the Marallaneng Secondary School hall for the Jubilee Mass, officiated by host Bishop Jan De Groef, M. Afr., and concelebrated by several other priests and bishops. Bishop Anthony Adaji, MSP, gave the homily and encouraged our missionaries to

continue to make our churches available to the people so that at any time they can have access to Jesus in His Church.

The Choir from Blessed Isidore Bakanja Church provided worship music and people danced in thanksgiving to God. During mass, representatives from each parish served by an MSP priest presented gifts of appreciation. Both the Auxiliary Bishop of Johannesburg, Bishop Duncan Tsoke, and Bishop Peter Holiday of Kroonstad made remarks to appreciate, congratulate, and pray for the MSP.

The event closed with the unveiling of a memorial stone etched with the image of St. Paul and erected by Ficksburg parishioners to mark the jubilee. We seized this moment to appreciate all individuals and groups who have contributed to our 25-year mission story. From the depth of our hearts we say:

*Rea leboha! Dankie! Syabonga! Thank you!  
Long live Missionary Society of St. Paul!  
Long live MSP South Africa!  
Long live the Catholic Church in South Africa!*

*\*harmattan: dry, dusty easterly wind on the West African coast*

**Sponsor a  
Missionary  
Priest Today!**



*The Missionary Society of St. Paul has more than 100 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.*

Please use the enclosed envelope or send your donation to the address below.

**Missionary Society of St. Paul  
Mission Development Office  
P. O. Box 300145  
Houston, TX 77230-0145**

Phone: (713) 747-1722  
Email: [usamsp@yahoo.com](mailto:usamsp@yahoo.com)

Iperu, Nigeria ▼

Kafur, Katsina State, Nigeria ▼

Torit, South Sudan ▼

Lodwar, Kenya ▼

Ficksburg, South Africa ▼



*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.*

**African MSP Mission Fields Featured in this Issue**



# Open + Thanksgiving Day

MSP's formation house in Iperu-Remo, Ogun State was the site of the 2017 Open and Thanksgiving Day on January 29, 2017. This annual pilgrimage to the Iperu community includes prayer, thanksgiving, celebration, and the assembly of priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, AMSP members, supporters, and friends of the society. This year's event was remarkable in its celebration of the 40th anniversary of the MSP as a society of apostolic life in the church.

Bishop Anthony Ademu Adaji, MSP, of Idah Diocese presided over the solemn mass, concelebrated by Bishop Albert Ayinde Fasina of Ijebu-Ode Diocese.

After communion, Fr. Faustinus Okeyikkam, MSP, who now works in the U.S., spoke about the challenges and heartbreak of his mission experiences in South Sudan—he expressed the need for support of MSP missions. Attendees responded generously to this call during a special prayer and blessing called “seed-sowing” that followed. It was conducted by Rev. Frs. Vincent Omokpakpo, MSP, and Peter Ireorji, MSP.

The traditional general thanksgiving procession followed, with AMSP representatives from various zones in Nigeria bringing distinctive gifts to the altar.

*Right: scenes from the annual pilgrimage to the site where the MSP first opened its doors in 1977.*



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*“Dear brothers and sisters in Christ and our dear Associate Missionaries of St Paul, as I stand on this podium and look at what is happening here, what the Lord is doing in and through you—I can with all humility, say that I have some taste of the feeling of great Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Philippians, thus: ‘When I think of you, I thank my God; and when I pray for you, I pray with joy.’”*  
—Bishop Anthony Ademu Adaji, MSP, in his homily at Open and Thanksgiving Day

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# An AMSP Before I Knew What It Meant

by Renee Hammer, Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Paradise Hill, Saskatchewan

As of August 2014, I will admit I knew very little about Nigeria and I had no clue what MSP stood for. Our own parish had not had a resident priest since 1985 and our rectory had been used as a meeting place, a place to hold catechism, and a place for fellowship and ice cream after Saturday evening Mass. We had never had a parish secretary before and I, as secretary for the parish council, volunteered to “give it a try” with this new priest from Nigeria.

Fr. Peter Nnanga, MSP, came as our new priest. I quickly learned that MSP were the initials for The Missionary Society of St. Paul and that I dare not leave these beloved initials off Father’s name whenever and wherever I wrote it. So as Fr. Nnanga began his mission work in Canada, I also began my own journey that has led me to proudly become one of the new AMSP members in the newly formed MSP Canada Mission.

From the very beginning, Fr. Peter injected our parish with joy and a new level of spirituality. His love for music and his community mindedness allowed him to blend into our parish almost seamlessly. His desire to be with the people of his Church gladdened us and we were so surprised when he joyfully suggested that he would live in the repurposed “rectory,” instead of in a modern rectory in a neighboring parish. With a few renovations, many prayers, and a lot of love, the rectory was ready and he moved in.

Fr. Peter made it a true home, where he always welcomed his people. Because we are a smaller community, the rectory was regularly used for



meetings, bible studies, fellowship, and church office work. Conversations were full of laughter and encouragement, always with the Catholic faith and the deepening of our own faith at the center. Father shared with us his love of his homeland, Nigeria and also, with great pride, about the workings of the MSP in Nigeria and other countries in which they serve.

When any of his brother priests visited, Father would ask me and other parishioners to come and meet them. It was quickly evident that his brother MSP priests also worked with the same faith, deepening love, and encouragement as he was giving us in Paradise Hill. In August 2015, we were blessed with visits from MSP Superior General, Very Rev. Fr. Victor Onwukeme, MSP, and U.S. Regional Superior, Rev. Fr. George Okeahialam, MSP. After touring our beautiful church, they gratefully accepted an invitation to join my husband and two sons at our house for a meal. It was truly an honor to host them and share our Canadian hospitality.

I worked alongside Fr. Peter and it was only natural that I learned many things about the MSP—who they were, what they stand for, and examples of many things they do in

their ministry. I was encouraged to be involved and gladly volunteered many hours helping with tasks Father had been assigned as they worked to become an official Canada mission, separate from the U.S. mission.

Sadly for us, Fr. Peter's stay in Paradise Hill was short-lived and he was called to serve as pastor of Spiritwood

after having being with us for only one short year. I was very thankful that by this time, I, along with my family, had already developed a keen interest in the MSP. I didn't want it to end just because he was no longer our parish priest. Fr. Peter had planted the seed of becoming an AMSP member for an entire year and, so, when he continued to ask for assistance on projects and also prayers for the mission, I eagerly said yes.

From all that I have seen and experienced with the MSP priests in our diocese—their deep commitment to helping us all really take hold of and develop our Catholic faith, leading all of us with an extraordinary example of faith and humility—I wanted and still want gracefully, to do what I can to see their missions in Canada and around the world continue. As



seen by the wonderful attendance at the inaugural first Mass celebrating the new MSP Canada Mission, I, along with so many others, are thankful to God for sending MSP priests to serve in our diocese.

# Christ's Ambassadors in Canada

Canadian missionaries have long served the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church at home and abroad. In Nigeria, the Spiritans, the Christian Brothers, Our Lady's Missionaries, and many others have come with generosity. When these Canadians embarked to Nigeria, one wonders if they imagined that Nigerians would one day be missionaries to Canada.

Today, MSP priests are serving in two Catholic dioceses in Canada. Rev. Anthony Afangide, Rev. Frederick Akah, Rev. Peter Paase, and Rev. Peter Nnanga serve in the Diocese of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; and Rev. Dominic Mbah serves the Diocese of Peterborough, Ontario. These five MSP priests bring to their respective pastoral ministries their homegrown faith and their experiences from previous missionary work in nations including Liberia, Malawi, and the United States. At the same time, they are enriched by the strong faith of the people they now serve.

In 2015, the MSP General Council created the separate MSP Canada Mission, distinct from the previous shared leadership structure with the MSP in the United States. Most Rev. Albert Thévenot, M. Afr., Bishop of Prince Albert, formally inaugurated the MSP Canada Mission at a Eucharistic celebration in St. Joseph Calasactius Roman Catholic Church, North Battleford, Saskatchewan on January 25, 2017.

We are grateful to Bishop Thévenot for presiding at this memorable event and for providing an initial base for the MSP Canada Mission office in the Prince Albert Diocese. Special thanks are due to all the faithful of St. Joseph Calasactius for successfully hosting this event. The MSP Canada Mission is also indebted to our board of directors, our legal team, and MSP friends across Canada for their diligent



*Fr. Peter Nnanga, MSP, baptizes an infant. Fr. Nnanga is one of six MSP priests serving or studying in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Ontario in Canada. MSP now has a distinct mission office in Canada, where priests have served since 2014.*

service and generous support.

The Christian faith is a gift to be shared with all peoples. The MSP has come to Canada bearing this precious gift—once received from early missionaries. Our presence in Canada testifies to this witness of faith and reciprocates the generosity of Canadian missionaries to the Catholic Church in Nigeria. By responding to the invitation to serve in the Dioceses of Prince Albert and Peterborough, the MSP is following in the footsteps of its patron, St. Paul, as “Ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20).

The MSP Canada Mission is thankful to God for our fruitful pastoral ministries in Canada and look forward to future mission collaborations with other dioceses in ministering to Canadian Catholics.

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*Fundamental aspects of the MSP apostolate include primary evangelization and re-evangelizing communities of faith. Missionaries of St. Paul strive “to be all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22), in order to proclaim and witness God’s love in every locale and context.*

*—Fr. Idara Otu, MSP*

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*by Rev. Idara Otu, MSP, who currently resides at the Scarborough Missions central house in Scarborough, Ontario, while studying at Regis College – The Jesuit School of Theology at the University of Toronto, Canada.*

# Five New Deacons Ordained

## 40TH JUBILEE EVENTS

**October 2016**

*Novena to Our Lady,  
Mother of Missions*

**January 2017**

*Pilgrimage to Iperu, Ogun State, Nigeria:*

-Retreats for MSPs and AMSPs

-MSP Prayer Cards

-St. Paul Lecture Series/Film

**January 28, 2017**

*Diaconate Ordination*

**January 29, 2017**

*Open & Thanksgiving Day*

**June 17, 2017**

*Priestly Ordination*

### **Dates to be Announced**

*MSP Local Walkathons*

*Adoption of Needy Schools*

*Training Programs*

-Information Technology & New  
Evangelization

-Sierra Club

*3-Month Mission Activities*

-Malawai, Cameroon, Gambia,  
Kenya, & South Sudan

**Fourth Quarter 2017**

*Ground-breaking Ceremony*

-Landmark project of proposed 600  
plots of natural vegetative land in  
Epe, Lagos State



**F**ive new deacons were welcomed into the Missionary Society of St. Paul (MSP)—during an ordination, which for the first time, was celebrated in the chapel of the MSP formation house at Iperu-Remo in Ogun State, Nigeria. On January 28, 2017, Reverends Felix Agibi, Peter Akor, Damian Ohagwa, Patrick Igwe, and Alphonsus Obiele were ordained to the diaconate. The diaconate is the first of the three components of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Ordaining Prelate Most Rev. Anthony Adaji, MSP, Bishop of Idah Diocese, said that no one, therefore validly exercises ministry of an office not conferred on him. In the same vein, no one loses the faculty of the previous office validly received on account of another office validly conferred. So deacons are ordained to be ministers of the word, the altar, and charity.

In his homily, Bishop Adaji remarked on the significance of the new members as the MSP order celebrates 40 years of missionary activity. Every ordination, either priestly or diaconate, echoes a sign of growth and increase in the priestly vocation and specifically a confirmation of the future of the MSP.

“A lot of things have happened in the last 40 years, and by the grace of God, many will still happen,” Bishop Adaji said. “For me, the celebration today invokes a certain nostalgia—a sweet memory of the past... We are what we are today because of the multiple graces of God yesterday. This year, in a special way, we, the members of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul, try to look back into the 40 years of our journey as a missionary family in the church, and as we do this we cannot but remain exceedingly grateful to God who has poured so much of His grace upon us—graces through the men and women He used to plant the seed, water and prune the plant, and shape it in order to bear fruits.”

Addressing the candidates, he said, “My beloved sons, this ordination will confer on you a new status in the Church as clerics, even though you will still return to the seminary to finish your training. Use the few months left to re-assert yourselves into the formation. Open up yourself to Christ and let Him enter into you and heal all the weakness therein.”

# St. Paul Nursery School Holds Cultural Day

Recent tensions and conflicts of ethno-religious nature underscore the lack of cohesiveness and harmony among the various ethnic groups and faiths within Nigeria. Countless lives have been lost; properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. Many Nigerians are forced to migrate from their ancestral homes to live as internally displaced persons. The loss to the nation, economically and socio-politically, is incalculable.

In the midst of this strife is a growing and intensified sense of distrust, betrayal, and unprecedented unrest among the different tribes in Nigeria. There is, perhaps, no better time for a synergy of purpose between the Church and the State to establish concrete measures to curb such negative vibes in our society.

The Church's mission of reconciliation makes it imperative for her to engage in initiatives toward nation-building, peace, and mutual coexistence among the various interest groups in Nigeria. The Missionary Society of St. Paul has taken this task as an urgent challenge and is making efforts to infuse a consciousness of the need to value one another—even in the midst of our diversity.

It is this noble idea of mission that inspired a recent cultural day held at St. Paul Nursery & Primary School in Jikwoyi, Abuja. At the event, students learned cultural dances of other tribes and ethnic groups; a drama presentation by the kids emphasized the importance of being open to other people's cultures; and all participants



*At St. Paul Nursery School, the MSP sponsored a cultural day as a way for students to learn dances of other cultures, taste a variety of ethnic and cultural dishes, and participate in a dramatic presentation about being open to others who have different backgrounds.*

were able to taste dishes from other cultures.

Cultural Day was informative, educational, and highly entertaining for the children. Such initiatives are encouraged, especially among impressionable children. We believe that if the values of openness to others and mutual coexistence, are learned at an early age, young people will be more likely to make these values a way of life as they grow up. This will go a long way to curbing tensions, and creating a more peaceful, humane, and prosperous society.

—by Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Etuk, MSP

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*“The Church's mission of reconciliation makes it imperative for her to engage in initiatives toward nation-building, peace, and mutual coexistence among the various interest groups in Nigeria.”*

*Fr. Patrick Etuk, MSP*

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# MSP Creates Ambassador Charities NGO

## *Soft Loan & Interfaith Program Launched in Katsina State*

by Fr. Daniel Ifiok Udofia, MSP

Amid agricultural challenges and religious tension, a beacon of hope dawned with a new economic development initiative that started last year and was formally inaugurated in mid-December at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Mai Kambu, Kafur LGA, in Katsina State. The Mai Kambu Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Initiative (MSSEDI) provides a platform for local residents to access soft loans, agricultural inputs, and training in agricultural best practices. MSSEDI also promotes the peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. With an estimated population of 202,000, Kafur is a local government area (LGA) in Katsina State, a predominantly Muslim state in northern Nigeria.

To further enhance the holistic well-being of the human person—spiritually, socially, and economically—the MSP established Ambassador Charities as an NGO to deliver social services and empowerment to communities where our missionaries work. It is a pilot scheme we hope to gradually replicate in other missions, where applicable.

In Mai Kambu, this scheme is already a reality. More than 40 persons have benefitted from the soft loan program—using funds to buy improved seeds and fertilizers for farming, to replenish their livestock, or to invest in small businesses. Many have already repaid their loans with interest of less than five percent. This interest is plunged back into the pool, allowing more people to benefit.

“Three years ago, Fr. Stephen Ojapah shared with us... the plight of the people of Mai Kambu district,



*Above: Families who benefitted from the first set of soft loans issued through MSSEDI show their happiness and appreciation for the new NGO. Left: A high point of the December inauguration was an interfaith meal, appreciated by both Muslims and Christians, and a critical step in promoting religious harmony in the region.*

about the challenges you were facing as a people, especially as you struggle daily to eke out a living,” Fr. Patrick Etuk, MSP, remarked at the December event. “The picture he painted was of a people who are hardworking, zealous, highly determined, of uncommon faith, yet marginalized and awfully deprived. He not only intimated us about your good will—but you have demonstrated it. Even in the little you have, you were all too willing to share with us from the meager produce of your farms. The MSP has taken this

community to heart and I am here to let you know that you have a special place in our hearts.”

Charity Obetta is the benefactress who made MSSEDI possible. Quoting Islamic Scholar Aaidh ibn Abdullah al-Qarni, she said, “The first person who benefits from an act of charity is the benefactor himself, by seeing changes in himself and in his manners, by finding peace, by watching a smile form on the lips of another person.”

For her, the journey towards establishing this initiative began after meeting Fr. Stephen in 2014. Touched



*Left: Program sponsors included, from left: Frs. Stephen Ojapah, MSP, Walter Ezenwasu, MSP, Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Etuk, MSP, Charity Obetta—the donor who started the loan program, and an unnamed guest. Right: One seminar presented best practices on raising chickens.*

by the missionary ministry of the MSP and our works of charity within poor communities across the globe, Mrs. Obetta decided to sponsor a program to improve the socio-economic well-being of the people of Mai Kambu through agriculture. Before enrolling the first 40 households, she met with local residents who described their primary areas of interest: animal husbandry, crop production, trading, and skills acquisition.

The December session included seminars on farming without fertilizer or artificial pesticides, comments from loan recipients, an interfaith service, and a shared meal between Muslims and Christians.

One loan recipient, Emmanuel Ishaku, said, for years, he has served the community as a local pharmacist, providing medical care for the sick and dying. During emergencies, he sometimes renders services without charge. He said the MSSEDI program helped him purchase needed medicine and through experience, he has become more prudent in administering medicine with affordable charges.

Local farmer Many Isa said, “I lost many of my livestock due to diseases, but with the help of the loan I was

able to replace more animals.”

“Before now we had great difficulties having fertilizers. I really wish to appreciate the scheme for giving us easy access to affordable fertilizers which has really improved the cultivation of crops and harvest,” said Thomas Ibrahim.

The beneficiaries also expressed concerns, suggestions, and challenges on topics such as early disbursement of funds; increased financial assistance; veterinary drugs to tackle animal diseases; and accessibility to fertilizers and pesticides. Recipients said MSSEDI is only sustainable if beneficiaries consistently repay their loans with interest. They appealed to people who could afford to do so, to donate generously to the scheme, to allow others to access loans. They identified a need for seminars and symposiums to enlighten farmers on modern farming practices and ultimately, peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians.

Apart from the agricultural seminars, a high point of the event was the interfaith service that featured readings from the Bible and the Koran, plus reflection and prayers by Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Etuk, MSP, and

Imam Alhaji Salisu Abdullahi. Both clerics emphasized the need for proper enlightenment, justice, and openness to dialogue—which will encourage understanding, love, trust, and peaceful coexistence among different faiths. For peace remains the bedrock for development.

Government representatives who attended included Chairman of Kafur LGA, Alhaji Hamza Umar, and the Hakimin Kafur, Alhaji Rabe Abdullahi Dangaladiman Katsina.

We also held an interfaith meal—the first of its kind in that area. Our Muslim guests confessed they had longed for such an encounter for some time. We hope this scheme will continue to grow and help liberate many from poverty and also enhance peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians.

With Ambassador Charities, we have started something already in Gidan Mai Kambu that empowers the local population and encourages interfaith dialogue with the Muslim population. One success of this initiative is that immediately after the event, Fr. Stephen Ojapah was appointed director of inter-religious affairs in the Diocese of Sokoto.

# *Why not consider sponsoring a missionary priest today?*

*We have more than 100 seminarians in various stages of their priestly formation in Nigeria—these candidates need sponsorships for their continuous formation and education. You can help in training our seminarians and supporting our priests in their missions!*



**For further information, contact**

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