



THE WITNESS

...Keeping spiritual watch over Esanland

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Archbishop's Installation for March 7

Newly-appointed Archbishop for Benin City Ecclesiastical Province Most Rev. Dr. Richard Burke (SPS) will be installed next Friday, March 7, 2008.

A joint statement by the Chancellor of Benin Archdiocese, Rev. Fr. Michael Oyanofo, the Chairman and Secretary of the Installation Committee, Rev. Fr. Festus Ogbomwan and Dr. (Mrs.) A.O. Clark respectively, stated that the ceremony would take place at 10 am.

The venue, according to the statement, is the St. Paul Minor Seminary Ground, 30 Airport Road, Benin City.

Reports reaching THE WITNESS say preparations for the historic event had reached an advanced stage as the venue for the occasion, the Archbishop's official residence and all adjoining structures within the seminary enclosure had been given face-lift.

Our correspondent recalls that Most Rev. Dr. Burke's appointment was made public by the Vatican last December 24 (Xmas eve). Prior to his appointment as Archbishop of Benin City Most Rev. Burke was the Bishop of Warri Diocese, a capacity in which he will now function as Apostolic Administrator, according to Vatican statement.



New Administrator for Cathedral Uromi

A new Administrator has assumed duty at St Anthony Catholic Cathedral Uromi.

He is Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Matthew Ihensekhien. He succeeds Rev. Fr. Dr. Cosmas Aluede Ojemen who has since assumed duty at the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA) Port Harcourt.

Born on October 13, 1971, the new Administrator who hails from Ewohimi, attended Edo College, Benin City before proceeding to SS. Peter & Paul Major Seminary Ibadan for his Philosophy and Theology studies.

Fr. Ihensekhien was ordained priest on October 18, 1998 and worked as Vice-chancellor/Diocesan Secretary to Archbishop of Benin City from 1998-2001. He was also Director of Studies, at St. Rita School of Vocational Studies, Benin City from 2000-2002 when he proceeded for further studies in Strasburg France.

Fr. Ihensekhien holds Bachelors Degrees from the University of Ibadan and Pontifical Urban University, Rome respectively, and also Masters and Doctorate from Marc Bloch University, Strasburg, France



Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Matthew Ihensekhien.

UROMI DIOCESE IN 2 YEARS

Today's celebration of the second anniversary of the erection of our diocese is one that calls for elevated thanksgiving to God. If anyone who knows anything about running a catholic diocese and without prior knowledge visits our diocese and with a critical eye observes what has transpired so far, that person would rightly think that this ecclesiastical jurisdiction is more than five years old. But as we well know it has been only two years in existence. To use a scriptural passage, "Length of days is not what makes age honourable, nor number of years the true measure of life..." (Wisdom 4:7-8). In two years, without any

worry of contradiction, our diocese has taken great strides in virtually every sphere towards becoming the best that she can be. Of course, the journey so far is a testimony, not only to the dedication of all and sundry towards the growth of the diocese in the last two years, but also one to those who worked hard before December 14, 2005. As we acknowledge in the 'Prayer for Uromi Diocese', "We thank God for the generosity and efforts of all

those who prayed and worked for the creation of the Diocese". So while we rejoice and thank God for His blessings, we must realize that the foundations of the fruits we are reaping were laid in advance of these last two years. We must continue to ardently build on this foundation. So, why indeed do we have cause to celebrate and rejoice? In two years, I believe we have a lot to be grateful for. Spiritually, we can point to our two annual pilgrimages

to Our Lady's Grotto at Emu and the Divine Mercy shrine at Usugbenu, Irtua. I believe that the sacrifice and challenges met have not gone unnoticed by the Almighty. These two spiritual exercises represent a desire and a fulfillment for the spiritual advancement for many of Christ's faithful in this diocese. If you were at the first Emu pilgrimage in 2006 and then in 2007 you would have realized how that event is taking firm root in the hearts of many.

In terms of physical development, today we commission our Diocesan Chancery/Secretariat. This is a very major step forward in the running of the affairs of the Diocese. In fact, if this were the only achievement in two years, it would still be acknowledged as substantial in that time frame. But you may not know that a new block of rooms has been added to what is already available at the Brother Roman Catechetical and Renewal Centre, Ekpoma. Plans are underway for additional facilities at the Centre. Many of us have seen the completed grotto at Emu. Here again, the Diocese is not resting at this as other amenities will be provided in due course. Meanwhile, work has reached advanced stage on the Divine Mercy shrine.

As we enumerate and reflect on these indicators of growth,

Continued on Page 10.



One sure testimony of Uromi's march-forward - the new Chancery Complex being commissioned to mark the second year of her existence as a diocese.

Editorial on 'The Energy Question' -Page 10

TEEN PREGNANCY: ISSUES AND RELATED ISSUES (2)

By Rhianosime, Franki
T e e n s that are unguarded at their age are likely to develop what can conveniently be called the 'adolescent's sexually-active' traits. Teenhood is a period when young people are vibrant and sexually active. Those with a malformed view of sexuality have their ill-notions of sexuality experimented. Teens are more sexually active at this period and they are precariously inexperienced too. This is what worsens their dilemma. At their age, they feel are high pressure to have sex particularly from their counterpart. It must equally be borne in mind that this is the time teens get involved and sometimes fixated in drugs and alcohol. These get their inhibition reduced that what they would otherwise made a decision in the reversed, they will freely give in to. Like I have said in some other works, drugs and alcohol coupled with a crescendo of emotional tickles send teens brains to 'French leave'. Their decision thus often would be bereft of rationality and sanity. At this time, they throw overboard the implication of their act it is at such instances, teens get pregnant.

Speculations have it too that inexperience is a root reason for teenage pregnancy. Many teen girls are not aware of their sexual rhythms or even lack adequate knowledge of adequate sex education. And that they are in a time of experiment, they are more likely to get pregnant.

According to a UNESCO report on teen pregnancy in Britain, "There are four main reasons why girls in Britain become pregnant. We don't give children enough information; we give them mixed messages about sex and relationships; social deprivation means girls and more likely to become pregnant; and girls whose mothers were teenage mums are more likely to do the same."

While other points stand true of situations of teen pregnancy in Nigeria, the first and the third points are more influential reasons than the others proffered. Many young girls are very often impregnated not by young men of their age bracket but much older men. Findings put it that teenage girls are more likely to engage in romances and kisses with their peer than sex. Very often older men who shower teen girls with gifts and a promise to quench their material want get teen girls hooked to them and very often when these teen girls get pregnant, they are more likely to bring it to term than for their peer.

Other viable opinions put causes for teen pregnancies at Peer pressure, poor parental guidance, influence of the media, the starvation of love, the use of contraceptives and the like. Top ranking of these is the influence of the media. The dysfunctional censorship system in Nigeria has allowed the exaltation of sex as a standard of civility and maturity.

Thus many teens in other to breakaway form what seem to be a degrading status for them, being addressed as youngsters, will want to immediately identify with sex. This only gives a make-belief of maturity and not actuality or reality of the situation. Equally instrumental is the native family system background in Africa. The exaggerated gulf created between parents and children makes children find it difficult to confide in their parents. Many parents too sadly lack good parental skills. Girls very often will go through the volatile teen period experimentally and for the unfortunate group their lot may just be teen pregnancy.

There is yet another interesting contributing factor which seems to raise the stake of teen pregnancy and this is environmentally influenced. Many adolescents are victims of violent childhood. Admittedly, the experiences of a particular stage of development have effects either positively or negatively on the consequent stage of development. Adolescents with violent and love-bereft

childhood are more likely to be pregnant at adolescence. This is so because, their childhood experience will tell on their way of thinking and behaviour at adolescence. Tamkins, T. (2004) opines when the family environment does not include adverse childhood of long-term, negative psychosocial consequences.

The question of poverty cannot be discussed in low keys when analyzing teen pregnancy in our milieu. Poverty is an overriding problem in Nigeria. The capitalist trend which seems to be favoured by stiff spices of corruption and repressive injustices continually put the common man at the mercy of the rich. For survival therefore, many resort to the unwritten thesis of 'using what you have to get what you don't have'. Many who may have been hostile victims of the lousy hand of fate and misfortune usually would submit themselves at whatever cost to the vain pleasure of a man who promises them even a flicker of material sustenance not minding the cost and consequences. This is a major reason for teen pregnancy in Nigeria. Of an insignificant few are those who get pregnant by the dying culture of rape.

It should be borne in mind once again that our analysis of pregnancy is exclusive of the fact whether the baby is brought to term or not. For the most however, these are the conspicuous contributing factors. In our next edition, we shall look at the consequences of teen pregnancy both on the male and the female counterpart and proffer ways this menace can be checked or checkedmate.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PARTIES

On a face look, the issue of teen pregnancy may seem a case for young girls alone but one must be quick to know that the factors that influence teen pregnancy in the female folk are the same that affect the teen boy as well and equally the issue of teen pregnancy is not a self-indulgent accident. There is always the male party be he a young man or not. The implications to be considered at this section will not limit its ambit to the accidented girl alone but to both immediately and remotely concerned parties: the teen mother, the father, child and family of the teen.

Report reveals that many teen mothers are likely to bring about premature birth with low birth weight. The inexperience and circumstance of birth of the teen mother would make her pay less attention to prenatal care. A gruesome consequence thus will be that the preceding years will be marked with experiment as was the case with the grounds for pregnancy. Similarly, teen mothers are more prone to be poor dieting or nutritional deficiency. Inadequate nutrition during pregnancy is its counter effect on the child too and the complete formation of the child. Teen mothers are likely to suffer in the area of Medicare than for more mature women. During delivery, they are more likely to be vulnerable to eclampsia, infant mortality and maternal death. By the same token, they run the risk of other complications resulting from underdevelopment.

There is a disheartening lot that awaits teen mothers. Conspicuous among other is the drop out of school by teen mothers. If one takes a painstaking probe at most teen mothers one may find interesting true that most teen mothers do not otherwise pay hard interest to academics. Dropping out of school may matter to some in any case. What may matter for them more is the ignominy they may have to contend with that is associated by them not going to school.

The correlation between early childbearing and not finishing school as and when due affects career opportunity for the teen mother at the long run. Teen pregnancy is a course that determines to a negative turn the life and future of a younger mother.

To be continued

In recognition of the above, so many feminist movements have sprung up in quest of the emancipation of women. These feminists' movements can be categorized into three:
1. The traditional stance- this group believe that any woman who talks about liberation is immoral and corrupt. It is claimed by the traditional group that the woman and the man are not equal; that the woman is created for the sole-purpose of serving the man. She must know that she is by far inferior to the man. She is passive, submissive and has roles to play different from that of the man. Ladies and gentlemen, this is definitely unacceptable in our world of today. No condition is ever permanent. The only condition that is permanent is change itself. So, to say that women should perpetually be glued to traditional restrictions is quite unfashionable and not beneficial.
2. The radical stance This feminist group advocates the hating of men, competition with men and relegation of men. The slogan of this position is thus "I am more radical than you because I hate men more". Listen to what B. Steel, a radical feminist says: "women must achieve quality with men. But who want equality with animals. I don't wish to be his equal. I am already better than he is". In remarks of this nature, the radical feminist emphasizes the "hate men" propaganda. The negative consequences of this on children, family, marriage institution and the society at large cannot be over-estimated. Emancipation of

THE CHRISTIAN WOMAN AND THE CHALLENGES OF PRESENT DAY NIGERIA -Dr. (Mrs.) Eunice Oti Omoregie(5)



Prof. (Mrs.) O. Isiramen reviewing the book

women is not tantamount to relegation and hating of men.
3. The liberal stance the liberal stance insists that the stereotyping of sex role is a social injustice. The emphasis here is that while a woman must not neglect her roles as a wife and mother, she must not be denied the right to economic, social, legal, educational and political actualization. The liberal feminist condemns every inhuman sex roles but upholds traditional family values which do not stand against women's emancipation. It stresses that domestic chores must be balanced against any other public assignment that the woman is capable of.

Following the above feminist understandings, you can see the basis of the varied and confusing positions which are being upheld by today's Nigerian women. In this sense, Rev. Fr. Michael Akhigbu writes in pages 1ff that "the bane of the experiences of women has led to several misrepresentations, misinterpretations and misunderstandings". Ladies and gentlemen, my understanding of the emergence of the book under review is that it is aimed at guiding the Christian woman in the right direction and being capable of making the right judgment when making choices concerning her genuine emancipation. In this sense, the various contributors present some coping strategies to enable the Nigerian Christian woman address the challenges before her in an, emancipated manner.

(v) Coping Strategies Available to the Christian Woman

To be continued

All contributors agree that in overcoming cultural prejudices and discrimination against Christian woman and in trying not to fail in the family and also excel in her chosen career or vocation, the strategies revolves around her having unshaken faith and trust in God, not by going to native doctors as some of us often do, becoming timid or getting frustrated. Dr. (Mrs) E. Omoregie in pp. 108-110 says that it has to do with having correct personality or attitude to life, having to do with positive self carriage and determination. Women must be courageous in order to succeed and excel. Since women are known to be endowed with wonderful capabilities, Mrs. Simile says in pages 49ges 49ff that the devil is not relenting in wanting to bring them down to a very low ebb by using her children, husband and the general society against them, to this, she recommends all Christian women to adopt the strategy of continuous prayer because prayer is a potent instrument to success. They must know the word of God and according to Hoshea 1:8, Christians must meditate day and night on the word so that they can prosper. They must be good teachers and selfless in the services they render. In this sense, ladies and gentlemen, both the traditional and radical feminist positions are inappropriate. The teachings of liberal feminism have to be adopted along the lines of Christian virtues. (vi) Some Recommendations for Future Publications Ladies and Gentlemen, we all know that there is nothing perfect in this world. It is in this sense that I must not hesitate to draw

Attention to the defects I discovered in this Well-compacted piece. This is for future reference. Please.

Some of the articles did not address the them of the book. Some contributors have no references to their article. There is nothing in the world that is new. For an article to be regarded as academic, an author must show sign of haven read some other literature concerning the topic. These are usually reflected in the reference. The referencing methods of contributors are not uniform. This is academically unacceptable. All these are for future reference.

(vii) Conclusion

This academic piece, has addressed issues concerning the Nigerian society and the woman, the challenges before the Christian woman and the Christian strategies available for the surmounting of the challenges. At a way of concluding my job, I must add one obvious fact. It is sad to note that much of the psychological abuses of women are mostly perpetrated by their female counterparts. Female in-law (mothers in-law, daughters in-law and sisters in-law) usually perpetrate inhuman treatment on wives of the family. Even some daughters in-law do not want to see eye to eye with parents in-law. Women who are bold to venture into politics are mostly castigated by their women folk. In offices, female employees face the greatest problem with their female bosses who perpetually intimidate them and instill incalculable fear upon them. This is quite unfortunate most of us are guilty either as mother in-law or daughter in-law or sister in-law or female bosses. To be able to achieve our goals women should learn to be one another's keeper. For, in unity, we stand to succeed.

With all these issues which affect women so intimately and so profoundly, the option for success is for us women to begin to speak out in one voice against the agonies, hazards and sorrows which are predominant in our present circumstance within the Nigerian society. With God on our side, both our biological functions as wives and mothers will be successfully and appropriately harmonized with our public duties towards the betterment of our families, communities and societies.

To be continued

harmonized with our public duties towards the betterment of our families, communities and societies.

Then our husbands shall stand with their heads up and say to us confidently, in line with proverbs 31:10ff that there are so many good women but we are the best of all and our children shall call us (in the words of Dr. (Mrs.) Omoregie) "sweet mothers".

Another JDPC Animation

Workshop

The fifth monthly seminar: "Animation and Training on Women's Right/Child Labour and Abuse in Uromi Diocese" was recently organised by the Women's/Child Right Dept of the Justice Development and Peace/Caritas Commission (JDPC), Uromi Diocese.

The event took place at St. Anthony Cathedral Uromi.

The Deanery-based workshop featured many participants who were predominantly women.

Various guest speakers spoke on different topics as these relate to the theme of the workshop.

The first speaker, Dr.(Mrs.) Eunice O. Omoregie who spoke on "Women and Child-trafficking-The way forward", stressed the need for women to ensure they are fully empowered socially and economically.

This, she argued, can stop the male-folk enslaving them with impunity.

The second lecture was delivered by Dr. J.A. Abode, Chief Medical Director of Central Hospital, Uromi.

He spoke on "Health Implications of Barbaric Customary Practices and Widowhood".

He enjoined parents to be careful on how they handle their children medically which, more often than not, can lead to different

viral infections.

The third talk for the day was given by the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) Esan North East Local Government Regional Command, CSP Adamu Ngojin.

He spoke on "the Role of the Nigerian Police in the Enforcement of Basic Societal Laws".

In the course of his lecture, various questions which bordered on police/community relationship were asked and answers given.

In his response to one the questions, he reiterated the need for the people to support and co-operate with the police by feeding them with useful information.

The final lecture was delivered by the JDPC Legal Officer, Barrister Valentine Ebhomielen who spoke on "Dignity of Womanhood/Interpretations and Explanations of Widows (Prohibition) Law 2001 by Edo State House of Assembly".

Present at the occasion were the Director of JDPC, Rev. Fr. Fidelis. O. Arhedo who is the Chief Convener, Mr. Festus Inegbedion, JDPC Programme Manager who moderated at the event, Mr. Eremiokhale (KST) member of JDPC board, Mr. E. J. Otutu, Cathedral JDPC Chairman and Chief (Mrs.) E.B. Iseghohi, president, Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) Uromi Diocese, among other personalities.

By Inegbedion Festus.



Mr. E.J. Otutu, Dr. J.A. Abode and Barrister Valentine Ebhomielen sit and watch before the commencement of the workshop.



Rev. Fr. Fidelis Arhedo, JDPC Director, addressing participants at the workshop



The DPO, Uromi, CSP Adamu Ngojin, stressing a point at the seminar.



A cross-section of Catholic Women at the workshop



JDPC Programme Manager, Mr. Festus Inegbedion thrilling Catholic Women during the workshop.



Faces at the Animation workshop



Dr. (Mrs.) Eunice O. Omoregie, one of the guest speakers, during the workshop

EDITORIAL THE ENERGY QUESTION

It is more or less taken for granted that no nation can realize her full potentials without adequate availability of energy to power her industries and businesses. Hence, the issue of energy continues to occupy a central spot in our quest for development in the country. In the eight years of former president Obasanjo's tenure the power sector was always in focus. Huge resources running into billions of dollars were supposed to have been invested to provide the required energy to launch the economy to greater heights.

Apparently, not much would seem to have been achieved as electricity supply and distribution did not show marked improvements. A testimony to this is the incumbent president Musa Yar'Adua's intention to declare a state of emergency (whatever that means) in the power sectors during his campaign for the presidency. After eight months of servant-leadership, not much has been heard in that direction.

So the energy issue remains a major concern for many citizens. Beyond that, the issue of power supply is now generating a lot of controversy concerning exactly how much the Obasanjo administration committed in an attempt to revamp the sector. It began with President Yar'Adua's remark that after former President Obasanjo spent \$10billion, there is nothing to show for it.

However, recently reports have surfaced suggesting that actually on \$5.5billion was spent. The controversy has so far caused one of President Yar'Adua's aides his job. Herein lies the big question. How much was really spent? How was the money disbursed and expended? Who got what and for what purposes?

The controversy about exact figures should not be too difficult to resolve. Are there no records of transactions and contracts for the electricity production and distribution? Who is lying here, the President Yar'Adua or the aide relieved of his duties and World Bank Vice-President for Africa Madam Oby Ezekwesili? We may never know. Besides, should EFCC and ICPC not be given access to available records to determine the correct state of things in this all important matter?

Like many other issues, this one may soon be overtaken by others. But this should not be allowed to be. President Yar'Adua owes it as a responsibility to Nigerians to clear the air about this vexing situation. Indeed, there might even be another point for consideration. If, as the President has asserted, there is nothing to show for the billions spent - \$5.5 or \$10 should there not be an investigation to ascertain what exactly went wrong and hold somebody responsible?

If all of these are properly sorted out, then the nation will be the better for it. But if the state of affairs remain what they are, the recent, and if you like, renewed battle cry for the power sector by the President might just be another round of never-to-be-fulfilled promise.

FR. OJEMEN SECONDED TO CIWA ...SENT FORTH

It was with mixed feelings that the Bishop, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze along with priests of Uromi Diocese gathered in a brief ceremony to wish Very Rev. Fr. Cosmas Ojemen the best in his new appointment as the Registrar of the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt.

At the event which took place at the Bishop's residence on Thursday February 7, 2008, priests were commended the pastoral efforts of Fr. Ojemen both in the Archdiocese of Benin and Uromi Diocese. While urging him to maintain his standards in approaching pastoral work, the priests expressed confidence that Fr. Ojemen will be a good ambassador for the Diocese in his new appointment.

In his response, Very Rev. Fr. Ojemen thanked His Lordship and his brother priests for their kind remarks. He implored all to be mindful of him in their prayers and promised to apply himself to his new appointment as Registrar in the institute.

We at The Witness join others in wishing Fr. Ojemen God's inspiration in his new portfolio. Fr. Ojemen has since resumed work at CIWA. Before his move to Port Harcourt, Fr. Ojemen was the Administrator of St. Anthony Cathedral, Dean of Agbazilo Deanery and a Consultor in the Diocese.

PA. OMOAREGHAN LAID TO REST

The catholic community of Ewatto Parish have been told emulate the legacies and exemplary life of Pa. Gabriel Omoareghan, who passed on December 28, 2007.

Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Onolemhenhen made this remark in his at the funeral Mass for the deceased, which took place at the St. Anthony Catholic Church, Ewatto on Friday February 8, 2008 and was presided over by His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Augustine Akubeze.

Speaking further at the well attended Mass, Fr. Onolemhenhen described the Late Pa. Omoareghan as one who lived a devout and committed christian life. Recounting his experiences with Pa. Omoareghan, the homilist observed that he was a devoted husband and father to his

eight children. This love and devotion was also extended to others in a rare display of generosity. According to Fr. Onolemhenhen, the passing on of Pa. Omoareghan is a big loss to the catholic community of Ewatto, noting his unrelenting efforts for many to ensure the growth of the catholic faith.

While reminding the congregation of the inevitability of death, Fr. Onolemhenhen urged everyone to live in positive lives that touch and inspire others to do same. He admonished all to always be conscious leaving good legacies that others can always point to.

Also in attendance at the Mass was the Bishop of Ilorin Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Ayo Atoyebi. He was joined by priests from his diocese, priests and brothers of the Dominican Community in Nigeria and other priests from Uromi and Benin City dioceses. Present also were sisters of various religious congregations especially those of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus community and many of the lay faithful from near and far.

Pa. Gabriel Omoareghan was later laid to rest at his residence in Ewatto. May his soul rest in peace. Pa. Omoareghan was born on May 31, 1925 at Idinwe, Ewatto. Educated at St. Anthony Primary School, Ewatto and St. Columbar's Teachers' College, Agbor, Pa. Omoareghan worked variously as a teacher and then a headmaster until he retired meritoriously from active service in 1984. To mourn him are his eight children, among whom are Rev. Matthew Omoareghan, O.P. and Rev. Sr. Angela Omoareghan.



CORRIGENDUM

In the Front Page lead story of our last edition, we inadvertently published that JDPC bought off a convict for N20,000. The correct amount is N7,000. The error is highly regretted.

Being Communiqué at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja February 11-16, 2008

I. PREAMBLE

1. We, members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, held our First Plenary Meeting for the year 2008 at the Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre (DRACC), Sabon Lugbe, Abuja, from February 11 to 16, 2008. We prayerfully reflected on and discussed the theme: To restore all things in Christ. We now present our communiqué to the Church and to the nation.

II. OUR GRATITUDE TO GOD

2. The Holy Spirit reawakens in us our faith in one God. We give thanks to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in our union with Christ, has given us every spiritual blessing". He has made known to us the mystery of his purpose: "to bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth" (Eph 1:3-10). Christ, "the firstborn Son, who was raised from death" (Col 1:18), is the Universal Defender of human dignity. He restored our dignity by reconciling us to the Father and to one another in his death on the cross.

For the Church

3. We thank God for his goodness to his Church in our land and to our nation. Despite all pressures and constraints, despite the infidelities occasioned by human weakness, the Church of God in Nigeria is growing from strength to strength. Since our last Plenary Meeting in Ado Ekiti, in September 2007, the Church in Nigeria has been blessed with three new Bishops and two new Archbishops. Most Rev. Anthony Adaji, M.S.P., Auxiliary Bishop of Ibadan, was ordained on September 22, 2007; Most Rev. Emmanuel Badejo, Coadjutor Bishop of Oyo, was ordained on October 20, 2007; and Most Rev. Hyacinth Egbebo, M.S.P., Auxiliary Bishop of Bomadi, was ordained on February 2, 2008. The vacant Metropolitan See of Benin City was filled on December 24, 2007, by the transfer from Warri Diocese of Most Rev. Richard Burke, S.P.S. He succeeds Most Rev. Patrick Ebosele Ekpu. On January 31, 2008, Most Rev. Matthew Ndagoso, former Bishop of Maiduguri, was installed 3rd Metropolitan Archbishop of Kaduna, succeeding Most Rev. Peter Yariyok Jatau.

We express profound gratitude and respect to Archbishop-emeritus Ekpu and Archbishop-emeritus Jatau for many years of dedicated service to the Lord and to his people. We also congratulate our new Bishops and Archbishops. May the Lord grant them each of them the strength, courage and wisdom they need as leaders of God's people.

For the nation

4. We thank the good Lord for our country Nigeria, especially for the relative harmony and peace we have enjoyed in the land. This is not because the April 2007 elections and subsequent local government elections went well. It is rather because God's grace

and mercy have sustained the patience of our people in the face of blatant and crude provocation. This does not, by any means, justify complacency on the part of those responsible for our public affairs. The way to show gratitude for God's mercy is the way of doing things right.

Despite the slow pace of our election tribunals, we see the hand of God in the courageous decisions of the judiciary at the election tribunals and in other courts of higher instance. We see the gradual emergence of a truly free and independent judiciary. We encourage the judiciary to be continually courageous in establishing the truth and dispensing justice in all matters. This will ensure the stability of our democratic process. It is almost one year after the last general elections. Therefore, we ask that electoral disputes be dealt with expeditiously, for, as the saying goes, justice delayed is justice denied. The fact that many cases from last year's election are still with the tribunal generates a sense of insecurity in many public office holders. It also constitutes a major distraction from the tedious and delicate task of governance.

III. VIOLATION OF HUMAN DIGNITY

5. The flawed federal and state elections of 2007, and the subsequent local government elections, represent a brutal reminder that there is a culture of violation of human dignity in our country. The rights of every Nigerian as human beings are violated by some policies which are ill-conceived with little or no input from the people. Even some good policies are poorly implemented. Nigerians observe that many of our leaders, at all levels of government, assume that they are omniscient and omnipotent by the mere fact that they head an office or government parastatal. Our people witness many manifestations of the erroneous presumption that power is knowledge and that to be in office is to monopolise wisdom. This kind of thinking encourages arbitrariness in policy making and execution. It violates human dignity because it excludes the people from the process of governance.

6. The human dignity of the Nigerian is also violated when his or her rights as a citizen of Nigeria are not recognized beyond the boundaries of his ancestral home. This is the "indigene-settler" dichotomy that shows itself in ethnocentrism. We appreciate the wisdom of the principle behind the "quota system" and "federal character policy". But the operation of this policy sometimes amounts to making some Nigerians second class citizens or even outright aliens in their own country and deprive Nigeria of the services of her most competent sons and daughters.

7. We note with satisfaction the pledge of President Umar Yar'Adua in his inaugural address to be a servant-leader. The fact that this notion has strong

RESTORING OUR NATION

biblical roots enables us to identify ourselves with it. Christ Jesus himself has taught us: "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all" (Mk 9:35). "If anyone of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to redeem many people" (Mk 10:43-45). While we commend the President for this pledge, we appeal to him to ensure that only those who share this notion of leadership are appointed to be in his government. For it is not enough to hear this from the President, it is also necessary that he be manifest in the utterances and conduct of his ministers and heads of parastatals. We urge all public office holders to respect every Nigerian citizen in the discharge of their duties. Then they will be veritable civil servants and not lords and masters of the citizen.

IV. HUMANE REFORM AND POLICIES

8. Our country needs radical reform through person-centred policies in the education sector. We appreciate the campaigns mounted by well-meaning individuals urging the National Assembly to pass the Child Rights Bill. Judging from increasing and demeaning instances of crimes like child abuse, child trafficking, child abandonment etc this Bill is necessary. However, the government that denies a child good and qualitative education, by refusing to cater for the child in whatever school the parents of the child want, is abusing the child. We are all aware that our public schools have no good infrastructure. They lack adequate and qualified teachers. A good number of politicians and civil servants do not send their children to public schools. Is it then not an abuse of children to send them to these schools? Every Nigerian child has a right to education. It is the responsibility of government to adequately equip public schools. It is also the responsibility of government to contribute to the education of a child in a private school. We urge our legislators to pass the Child Rights Bill and abrogate any law that discriminates against some children because of the religion or status of their parents.

The NUC And Affiliate Colleges

9. The formulation and implementation of policies in matters of education should not be left to government officials alone. To do that is to violate the freedom of stakeholders in the sector. It will install a regime in which government unilaterally determines what is taught and what is learnt in our schools. This will not conform to democratic principles. It is in this regard that we express our dissatisfaction with a recently announced and retroactively applied policy of the National Universities Commission (NUC). This policy concerns affiliate colleges, especially our Catholic seminaries and religious institutions. While we see the need to regulate university education, such a noble task should not be done outside the law. The constitutional rights of the Nigerian

citizen should not be violated. In many countries of the world, the existence of affiliate colleges helps to prevent over-population of university campuses. In Nigeria, it is on record that some affiliate colleges have better facilities and are better run than even the universities to which they are affiliated. It is also on record that they make their facilities available to lecturers and students of such universities. It is equally on record that Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan, began as an affiliate college of the University of London. The health of university education is put in danger when the National Universities Commission operates in a way that renders the university senate superfluous. The policy that bars graduates of religious institutions affiliated to Nigerian universities from seeking secular appointments, and or admission to secular higher education, is in violation of Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution. The duty of the NUC is not legislative. It is regulatory and advisory. Therefore, we encourage the NUC to carry stakeholders along in discharging this duty. We ask that the injustice inherent in the policy be rectified without delay.

10. Authentic development is centred on the human person and orientates the human person to his supernatural destiny in God. It is the attainment of self-fulfillment within our collective fulfillment. It is not just the availability of infrastructure, neither is it just a matter of enviable economic indices. While all these are necessary, they do not suffice where respect for human dignity is lacking. Our country experiences the absence of authentic development because of our abysmally low record of respect for human dignity. It is because our humanity is impoverished that we experience economic poverty. The economic poverty itself leads to insecurity of life and property in a land where corruption and incompetence have crippled our police, and many other institutions and sectors of our national life. The Niger Delta crisis, for example, will be resolved when greater attention is given to human and infrastructural development.

V. OUR ATTITUDE TO GOD

11. In all that we do, our attitude to God matters. The violation of human dignity is itself traceable to our failure to give God his due. The violation of human rights is therefore a manifestation of the violation of God's own rights. For, as Christ said: "Whoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto me" (Mt 25:40-45). By way of a paradox, there seems to be no room for God in our country, even though there is space for building many places of worship. If the situation in our country is to change, we must begin to respect the rights of God by respecting the human and civil rights of our fellow citizens.

Christ Jesus offers us the possibility of positive change by calling us to holiness. This call to holiness is addressed to all, irrespective of religious affiliation. The path to holiness passes through the way of interpersonal relationship with God and relationship with one another. It is the way of conversion to the good, to truth, and to God. It is the way of personal and collective responsibility for cooperating with God in the restoration of all things in

Christ. In this season of Lent, we receive a renewed call to holiness. It is a call to tread the path of repentance from sin, a call to conversion to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6). If this conversion is to take place, we must rediscover the word of God as nourishment for our spiritual life and for our lives as citizens of Nigeria.

12. The word of God can make us good disciples of Christ and good citizens of our country. Our participation in the task of making our country a better place can be made when we allow the word of God to give us clear indications in addressing the issues that we face as a country. Our interventions will be in the name of God when our words and actions are rooted in a deep reflection on the word of God. This word is a two-edged sword (cf. Heb 4:12), capable of helping us to discern and to act. Our contribution to the task of nation building must start again from the Gospel. We are to be people of the Gospel, ready to follow Jesus without compromises. We look forward to the celebration of the Year of St Paul, that great preacher of the word of God, which begins in June this year. We also look forward to the World Synod of Bishops to be held in October this year, with the theme: "The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church". In order to be signs and instruments of the restoration of all things in Christ, we must be ready to proclaim and bear witness to the word of God.

VI. OUR COMMITMENT

13. On our part, we as a Church recommit ourselves to stand up against injustice, abuse of human rights, corruption and discrimination both in the Church and in the society. We challenge our Christian politicians to stand up for Christian values and work vigorously for a better society. We call on all Catholics to revitalize their commitment to the mandate of missionary enterprise and bring the good news to all through their witnessing.

14. Conscious of the vital role that university education can play in national restoration, we look forward to admitting students into Veritas University of Nigeria (VUNA) this year. We pledge to run a university noted for spiritual, moral and academic excellence, a university where the younger generation will be formed to be future leaders of this country.

VII. CONCLUSION

15. Our faith in Christ, in whom God is restoring all things, gives us the confidence that we can build a better country. As we prepare to celebrate our 2nd National Marian Congress, which is to take place May 30-31, 2008, at the Papal Ground, Kutwa, Abuja, we commend our country and its wonderful people into the hand of our Lord through the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of God and Queen of Nigeria, she who heard the word of God and kept it.

Most Rev. Felix Alaba Job
Archbishop of Ibadan
President

Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji
Bishop of Umuahia
Secretary



THE WITNESS

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Commission resettles Ex-convict

By Enaifoghe Hope Isi

The Prisons Welfare Department of the Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas Commission, Uromi Diocese empowered an ex-inmate of Ubiaja Prison (name withheld). The man was discovered on December 19, 2007, during the Commission's Prisons apostolate when the young man informed the commission that he had almost completed his five (5) years jail term.

The man who hails from Ujogha in Esan West local government

area of Edo State, had been convicted of obtaining/receiving stolen property (foam). A carpenter by profession, he had used his knowledge of the trade to the advantage of the prisons and its officials in both major and minor carpentry repairs. The Director of JDPC Rev. Fr. Fidelis O. Arhedo, realizing the importance of making life meaningful for this ex-inmate at the completion of his jail term, decided to equip him with carpentry tools and a cash gift.

On the whole, the cost of purchasing the tools plus the cash gift meant to open a shop amounted to thirty six thousand, five hundred (N36,500) naira. Items bought include big and small hammer, thick chisel, socket chisel, long clamp, G. Clamp, 04 and 05 jack plane, 18 and 24 inches saw, a set of chisel, big and small file, big bar, jack mount 8 and 10 inches cutter, sharpening stone, a set of saw and spoke shave, etc. During the presentations, the Director of JDPC, Rev. Fr. Fidelis

Coming Events

1. Saturday, March 7, 2008 - Installation of Most Rev. Richard Burke as Archbishop of Benin City at St. Paul Minor Seminary Compound at 10am.
2. Wednesday, March 12, 2008 Biblical Seminar for Priests and Lay faithful at St. Anthony Cathedral, Uromi. Time: 10am.
3. Thursday, March 20, 2008 Chrism Mass at Anthony Cathedral, Uromi. Time: 10am
4. Saturday, March 29, 2008 Second Annual Pilgrimage to the Divine Mercy Shrine at Usugbenu. Details to be announced soon.

Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have just met. Find out their thoughts on Page 11



Arhedo enjoined the ex-inmate to make maximum use of the items to better his life and that of his family. In the same vein, the prison officials, moved with excitement, advised the young man not to sell the items. On his part, the recipient who spoke in an emotion-laden voice, but full of appreciation, promised not to betray the confidence reposed in him. Pictured (left is Fr. Arhedo with the Commission's Legal Officer, Barrister Valentine Ebhamielen, presenting an envelope to the ex-convict, Sunday Bello (in sunglasses) as Prisons officials watch. Inset shows the set of tools

Catechists form association

An association of all Catechists trained in the last 20 years at the Brother Roman Catechetical and Renewal Centre, Ekpoma, has been inaugurated. Membership is drawn particularly from Benin City Archdiocese and the dioceses of Uromi, Auchi and Warri. The Catholic Bishop of Uromi was represented at the inaugural ceremony by his Vicar, Very Rev. Fr. John Akhidue. Also present were Rev. Fr. Francis Okhah who is in charge of Catechists' welfare, Sr. Marie O' Halloran (Director of the Centre) and her assistant, Sister Victoria Iheanacho. The Archdiocesan Laity Chairman was represented by Mr. Chris Akhimien who with Prof. G.E. Okoloko, was made Associate Members of Bro. Roman Centre. The new alumni elected officers to run the affairs of the body.

Those elected include Rosen Evbodge, (President), Joseph Okoduwa (Vice President), Joseph Inusa (2nd Vice President), and Anthony Akhabue (Treasurer). Others were John Omjie (Financial Secretary), Rufus Irekhei (Secretary), Solomon Ovbiolukum (Publicity) and John Ibadore (Welfare)

Rev. Fr. Benjamin Ogbefun who was Master of Ceremony at the occasion in a group photograph with the Catechists and officials of the Centre

MONK STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF THE MASS

Among all the prayers of the Church is the ultimate, the most "holy and perfect sacrifice" (EPI) and most efficacious - the Mass. The is because Jesus is all in all important aspects of the Mass. Jesus is the altar and the sacrifice of the Mass and the priest (Preface 25). He is, in addition, the Word proclaimed at Mass (cf. Jn 1:1-14). He is there, too, among the people gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20), giving proper responses to every invitation and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit. And in the end, he the one in whom the Father is truly at home, in whom the Father is most delighted, most excited, most happy (Cf. Mk 9:2-8) because in him, He is most revealed, best worshipped, most honored and adored - is the grace received at Mass (Cf. Mk 2:1-12; Jn 4:10). In other words, Jesus is both our worship and the blessing we receive thereof. This is why the focus of the officiating minister and of the participant ought to, always or for the most part, be on Jesus. For he is the Mass. No one but Jesus should be put in the center of our celebration of the Mass, and nothing ought to be given more attention than his message - a life-giving and life-changing message, a message of redemption. Otherwise, we lose, just as surely as the prodigal son did before he came to his senses (Cf. Lk 15:14-17). Frankly, no prayer ought to motivate us more, nor interest us more because no prayer is more complete and compelling, more holy and perfect than the Mass

'Jesus is all in all'



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