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...Peace on earth to men of goodwill

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Wisdom Corner

**“If God Is The Centre
Of Your Life, No Words
Are Necessary.
Your Mere Presence
Will Touch Hearts!”**

- St. Vincent De Paul

Ikot Ekpene Diocesan Laity Retreat Concludes With Canonical Installations

By Fr. Stephen S. Udo



No fewer than thirty-five candidates received canonical installations as lectors and acolytes at the concluding Mass of the Diocesan Laity Retreat recently. The Catholic

Bishop of Ikot Ekpene, Most Rev Camillus Umoh, who was the Chief celebrant on the occasion called on the candidates to make a deeper self-reflection and so take a

right step so that they may respond to God's call in an appropriate way.

The Bishop in his homily maintained that the primary motivation to becoming priest should be

to fulfill the mandate of Christ to go into the whole world to proclaim the Good News. He thanked the candidates for their willingness to participate in this evangelizing

mandate of Christ. He however admonished that before any one undertake the journey to the priesthood, such a person should first learn the details: “Before you undertake to participate in the work that God wants you to do, please learn the details. Know the details of what you're expected to do, know the details of what you are about to put yourself into so that you'd be a happy and holy minister of God's grace. If you do not examine carefully what you are asked to do in order to be able to participate effectively and faithfully, you are most likely to make mistakes, and sometimes by the time you realize that mistake, it will become too late”.

Umoh further admonished the candidates against being distracted by the attractions of the priesthood even as he advised them to prepare to be happy, good and holy priests because “you cannot be a happy priest unless you are a good priest, and you cannot be a good priest unless you are a holy priest”.

Relating the Gospel passage of the day, the Bishop encouraged the candidates for installation and, indeed, all the priests to ensure that they remain in God's love. “Let me hope that today you have made

up your mind to be a beloved son of God, in whom God will be well pleased from the day of installation to the day of ordination, to the day of your burial as a priest. That God will be well pleased”, he enthused.

Bishop Umoh also advised the faithful to maintain the Holy Spirit which they received at baptism so as to remain in God's love, “My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, on the day of your own baptism, the heavens opened, the spirit came down and God also spoke, 'You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased', can God also say to you, after your Baptism, after your First Holy Communion, after your Confirmation, after your wedding days and all the things that you have done, in Your relationships with your brothers and sisters in the church, in your relationship with your business partners, in Your relationships in government offices where you work, can the heavens still be opened, can the Spirit still come down, can the voice of God still say, 'This is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased?' If God cannot say that, go back to the fundamentals,

cont'd on page 2

**Fiducia Suplicans:
Bishop Umoh Makes
Categorical Statement** Pg 3

**Pope Announces Year Of
Prayer Leading Up
To Jubilee** Pg 11

cont'd from Front page

Ikot Ekpene Diocesan Laity Retreat Concludes....

ask the fundamental questions, and correct what is wrong".

The Bishop called on the laity to assist the priests with their prayers noting that priesthood demands hard work and determination if one is to be truly what God wants him to be. Parents should advise their wards to follow the rules rather than resort to sentiments and blackmails, he said. Bishop Umoh however advised the candidates against allowing their parents to

lead them astray. "The priestly life has its own rules and regulations. It is not your parents that would tell you what you should do. The seminary operates with rules, therefore your parents have no right to tell the Church, the Bishop or the Seminary what to do. Correct your parents when they are wrong. Do not rely on sentiments or blackmail. When you are to be sent away, you will be sent away".

Of the thirty nine candidates who received

installations, thirteen were installed lectors and twenty six acolytes. Five of the Lectors were from the Society of Two Hearts of Love of Jesus and Mary (Two Hearts) and eight were for the Diocese. Twenty two Acolytes came from Two Hearts while six were from the Diocese.

The celebration also featured the inauguration of the 2024 Diocesan Harvest Planning Committee headed by Kgt Uduak Nathan.

The Laity Preident, Sir Cyprian Ennang thanked

God for making the Retreat a success. H thanked he Bishop for his magnanimous support for the Laity in the Diocese, noting that such paternal support boosts the efforts of the Laity. He further expressed his appreciation to the Bishop for permitting Fr Abel Abulu to moderate the retreat again for the second time even as he thanked the retreat moderator for his down to earth handling of the topics. He expressed the feeling that the retreat was very

educative while hoping fruitful outcome.

The Laity President expressed his sadness that some parishes could not turn up for the retreat despite all efforts by the council. He therefore called for sanctions for erring parishes in order to check the situation. He thanked the laity officers who turned up even as he urged them to put into practice, when they have learnt during the retreat.

While thanking the faithful of the diocese for

their cooperation especially as the diocese looks forward to host the Bishops conference, the Diocesan Bishop called for more cooperation to be able to complete the Retreat Center within the short period in anticipation of the great event.

The occasion witnessed a large turnout of the faithful some of who were at the laity retreat while other came to witness the installation of such a large number of seminarians.

QAS Alumni Vow To Transform Alma Mata – Set For Great Reunion

By Augustine Mendie.

Ex-students of Queen of Apostles Seminary, Afaha Obong in Abak, under the aegis of Association of Queen of Apostles Seminary Alumni in Nigeria AQASAN, have resolved to undertake total renovation of their Alma Mata to provide a conducive learning environment for the students.

The ex-seminarians also set August 2024 as the target month for what they coin as Great Magnificent Reunion, when all former students of the institution will come together for old time sake, and use the opportunity to access the school, thus providing solutions to certain problem areas.

In an enlarged executive meeting comprising the National executive members, presidents, secretaries and treasurers of all class batches in Afaha Obong, the Alumni arose with a wakeup call to improve upon the academic, structural as well as the general aesthetics of the school, and welfare of both students and staff.

The meeting began with the Holy Mass, presided over by the Rector of the school, Very Rev. Fr. John Ekanem, with Rev. Frs. Maurice Asuqwo, Francis Ebere and Patrick Ukpe concelebrating.

In his homily, the Rector, Very Rev. Fr. John Ekanem welcomed the executive members to the Seminary, their Alma Mata. He thanked them for choosing to hold the meeting in the mother

institution expressing the hope that the assembly would act as an obvious spur to transform the institution to another level.

The Rector however articulated the love and goodwill of the students and staff on the old boys, saying the gesture of coming to meet their young brothers will go a long way in encouraging the students in whatever they were doing in the school.

Pertaining to the state of affairs in the school, the Rector also an old boy, regretted that the school had undergone a lot of changes too inimical to identify with. These changes could be seen in the area of discipline, academics and structural development, "the Seminary is no more as you old boys left it. It has changed drastically", he lamented.

Drawing an analogy from the life of an old woman whom has given birth to many children, Fr. Ekanem maintained that the seminary has become like an old woman who has given birth to many children, the more children she delivers, the weaker she becomes.

This, he said is clearly seen in the decrepit structures and buildings which have suffered and given way to the wear and tear of the time, as well as being exposed to the vagaries of weather. In

terms of discipline, Ekanem intimated that this aspect of the seminary life had been relaxed due to the exigency of the time. 'things change according to time thus the level of discipline might not be as strict as you met it in your days', Rector Ekanem did say. He however agreed that students are instructed to adhere strictly to the rules for their future benefits, even as he called on the old boys to also admonish their

charged with the sole responsibility to plan and execute Great Reunion that will convoke a conglomeration of all old boys of the institution, from 1953 till 2022 batches. He equally alluded to the fact that the central planning committee, headed by Mr. Godwin Etokakpan, had since submitted some proposals subsequently.

Further discussion on the Reunion made the meeting to fix date for the Great Assembly in August 2024, leaving the exact date of the event to the

old boy to the publicity sub-committee to serve as class liaisons.

However, the group agreed that the National EXCO together with delegated members of the Alumni would visit each of the BOTs in order to re-inform them of their positions and possible date for their inauguration.

The meeting dealt with issues of registration and dues. This was to be done per batch, having been aware that QAS has had many class batches since its inception. Thus the issue of individual registration was jettisoned. Henceforth each class must register with the National Body with a token of ten thousand Naira, while twenty thousand Naira goes for annual dues. Whereas the registration fee should be remitted once, annual dues could be paid in peace meal quarterly of five thousand Naira to ease possible burden of the

classes. The meeting warned that all class batches should adhere to the new development as failure to do so will attract serious sanctions from the National Council.

Taking stock of what AQASAN has given back to the Alma Mata, in the last two years, it was discovered that some classes and individuals had done well in that direction.

Just last year, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Johnson had donated a benefitting signpost to the seminary. The current Executive

Council has undertaken provision of water system, toilet facilities, twenty-four rooms altogether and this is ongoing.

Class '83 embarked on the renovation of science laboratory while '84 provided a set of jerseys and a ball. Batch 737 undertook construction of the gate, but could not complete it, the school came to their rescue. Classes of '91,'95 and '99 also indicated their presence by purchasing twenty-seven new dinning tables in the refectory, undertook medical outreach for both students and staff, as well as renovated, painted the infirmary and St Dominic dormitory, and provision of the lawnmower respectively. Batch 2009 also paid hilariously back to the school by adorning the cooks with new wrappers.

However, this year the council is poised to complete toilet facilities and embark on new projects such as; erection of new dormitories, control of erosion menace, renovation of the refectory and employment of new teachers, paid by the Alumni, to help in the teaching of Mathematics, English, Music and Fine Arts.

It would be recalled that Queen of Apostles Seminary Afaha Obong was founded in 1953 and celebrated her golden jubilee in 2003. The founder, Bishop Moynagh intended the institution to be set aside for the training of young men to become priests.

Since 1953, this great institution has produced many priests, bishops and lay faithful, who have become giants in their various chosen professions.



wards whenever they got home on holidays.

During the meeting, the National president, Engr. Anthony Offong, informed that the assembly was convoked to discuss as few matters as three items which he listed to include The Great Reunion, Inauguration of Board of Directors (BOD), Executive council, Appointment of sub-committees and give back to QAS project.

The National president stated that a planning committee had since last year, been constituted and

discretion of the proprietor after a courtesy visit on him. Meanwhile, a seven-man deputation was elected to meet with the Bishop to concretize all deliberations and communicate findings accordingly.

Again, a four-man publicity sub-committee was set up to publicize the activities of the Great Reunion extensively. Members of this committee include; Mr. Joseph Umoh, Mr. William Obot, Prof. Johnson Akpakpan, and this author as the chairman. It was resolved that each class should appoint one

Fiducia Suplicans: Bishop Umoh Makes Categorical Statement



the positions adopted by various National and inter-territorial Episcopal Conferences across African Continent. Here the SECAM maintained that “rites and prayers that could blur the definition of marriage as an exclusive, stable and indispensable union between a man and a woman, open to procreation - are considered unacceptable”. SECAM maintained that

“union of the persons of the same sex are contrary to will of God and therefore cannot receive the blessing of the Church”.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria said in a statement that same-sex marriage was “against God's law” and blessing such would not be possible in the church because “the blessing of same-sex union was against God's law, the teachings of the church, and the law of the country.”

At the background of these, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene Nigeria warned his priests against blessing same-sex marriage. He maintained that God

created men to marry women and not man to marry man or woman to marry man. He warned that any priest that bless same-sex marriage stands the risk of being interdicted. “This diocese does not accept whatever is being taught by whoever teaches it if it leads to breaking God's law.” He warned that any one who is in a same-sex relationship cannot be blessed in the Diocese. He frowned that such relationship tagging it wrong teaching. He maintained that the church is a guide and that the church does not act according to the feeling of one simple person. He taught that the Church's

teaching is one definitive teaching. While allowing priests to bless individuals who approach them for blessing, he warned against blessing them as couples noting that “same-sex marriage is not irregular but sinful, that irregularity is very different form sinfulness”. “Sinful union is not irregular union”, he enthused.

Umoh advised parents to teach their children what is proper and acceptable before God and the human society. Parents should teach their children that marriage is between a man and a woman and not between man and man or woman and woman. He advocated return to the

fundamental teaching of Catholic morality. “We must go back to the fundamental teaching of Catholic morality. We do not depend on what politics says; we are not dependent on what the social media say. We depend on what God teaches us, and that is where we stand; I stand there and I invite you to stand there with me”, he maintained. The Bishop averred that “God has called us to be sons and daughters of God; and if we are, we have to listen to God”. He warned that any seminarian that is homosexual should “pack your things and leave the seminary”.

It would be recalled that the DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH published a declaration, Fiducia Suplicans on the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings a week before the celebration of Christmas. Recall also that the publication raised much dust as per the necessity of blessing Couples in Irregular Situations and of Couples of the Same Sex. As an outcome of the negative reaction that followed the publication, many Regional Conferences of Bishops had given directives which forbid such blessing in their territory. The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) published a document forbidding such blessing within the African Church. Theirs was a consolidated summary of

man and a woman, open to procreation - are considered unacceptable”. SECAM maintained that

Cleric Tasks Christians Against Worldly Distractions - As Cathedraticum Holds In Immaculate Conception Parish

By Susana Clement

The Vicar General of the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene Very Rev. Fr. Anselm Etokakpan has tasked Christians world over against worldly distractions. Fr Etokakpan who represented the Bishop at 2024 Pastoral / Cathedraticum visit to Immaculate Conception Parish, Ikot Ekpene stated this in his homily at the occasion.

The clergyman said Christians have allowed distractions, wrong advice

from people, ego, pride and selfishness to overwhelm them from listening to God's call in their daily life even as they live a life that does not defined where they come from and who they represent.

Reflecting on the first reading of the day, Fr. Etokakpan noted how the little boy Samuel, who lived with Eli, whom the Lord choose as his own answered God's call in a haste and in humility without delay. He noted in dismay the way Christians answer God's call in delay, keeping

worldly pleasures first before God. He however called on all Christians to emulate Samuel's footstep in answering God's call. Speaking further, the Vicar General admonished “God calls us in different way, as Priest, Religious, lay faithful and even in our homes and the society. It requires humility and selfless service that leads to the Glory of God in answering this call”.

Also speaking, the Parish Priest of Immaculate Conception Parish, Rev. Fr. Anthony Mbat, expressed

gratitude to His Lordship, the Vicar General, Priest and Religious and host of others for honoring the invitation. He solicited with everyone to support immensely to the success of the retreat centre, Nko for the coming of the Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria, CBCN.

In his address, the Laity President of Immaculate Conception Parish, Mr. Lawrence Ekpo thanked his Lordship for another epoch-making celebration after the maiden pastoral

visit to the Parish. He emphasized that the Bishop's regular visit has tremendously encourage the faithful to be in communion and mission in the journey of faith and also give a deep sense of belonging.

He further thanked the Parish Priest for the pragmatic way he handled the affairs of the parish, his Zeal and charisma in championing the erection of a Marian Shrine for the parish which is a path way of encourage the journey of faith among the parishioners.

Pastoral Visit: Abak Oko Acc Agog For Their Chief Shepherd

By Susana Clement

The serene setting of Abak Oko community came alive recently as the Chief Shepherd of Ikot Ekpene Diocese Most Rev. Camillus Raymond Umoh visited his flock in St. Theresa Autonomous Community Abak Oko on pastoral visit/cathedraticum. The Parishioners gathered in their number with their Parish Priest to receive his Lordship and his entourage to the Parish on this epoch making visit.

The significant part of the visit was the celebration of the Eucharist as a guarantee of the Pastoral blessing brought by the Bishop. Preaching the homily, Bishop Umoh elucidated on the need for Christians to be merciful on themselves first before they can benefit from mercy of God. Referring to the day's reading, the Cleric stated that David had mercy on Saul the King of Israel, despite the hatred. “David is a true example of how Christians

should live in peace with each other without hatred, he swore never to take revenge or touch the Lord anointed but rather left him for God. Bishop Umoh further noted that many Christians today are “Saul” in hatred, jealousy, persecution, malice, wickedness, and at times use evil to pay for kindness. He however warned all Christian against revenge, saying “there is no gain in taking revenge and hating others, hatred destroys people. He cautioned against destroying “people's moral stand in the public and people gossip and tarnish others image”

His Lordship also used the occasion to teach extensively on the sacrament. He said sacraments are actions of Christ and a way of grace that gives an access to achieve God blessing, thus sacrament is not receive in proxy, meaning one receives sacrament personally. The Bishop taught that for any

sacrament to be efficacious, it has three elements; mater, form and proper minister. Speaking on the sacrament of matrimony, Bishop Umoh taught that a man and a woman constitute the mater while their consent is the form. Umoh went on to engage the faithful in deep teachings on marriage. He took time off to explain such terms that constitute impediment of marriage to include affinity, deception, previous bond, crime, consanguinity and simulation saying these conditions will readily render marriage invalid.

In his welcome address, the Parish Priest, Rev Fr Patrick B. Sampson expressed his appreciation to the Bishop for finding time out of his tight schedule to come in person and visit the Catholic Community. Fr Sampson said that such visit would go a long way to strengthen the faith of the people of the area. He said he found himself lucky hosting the Bishop during the

celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Diocese. The Parish Priest noted that the joy of the faithful of the community is expressed in the large turnout despite being a weekday. He thanked the Bishop for giving him an assistant in the person of Fr Andrew Clement stating that despite the lean income of the area, the Catholic Community is happy to have the two of them. He further thanked the Bishop's secretary who came in company of the Bishop, the Diocesan Laity President who was represented by the Diocesan laity Council Secretary, as well as all who came to grace the occasion. Fr Sampson extended his appreciation to the three village heads of Abak Oko, Nsiak and Utu Edem Usung who were able to grace the occasion in person as well as the invited guests who come to lend support to the Catholic Community at the coming of their Bishop, noting that without their cooperation, the peace

enjoyed in the Community would not have been possible.

On his part, the Parish Laity President, Mr. Paulinus I. Ekpo thanked the Bishop for coming to visit the Parish and caring for his flock. He emphasized that the coming of the Bishop has awakened faith, grace and commitment to service in the community.

He thanked the Parish Priest and his assistance Rev. Fr. Andrew Clement, for

their pastoral role in the Parish even as he appreciated the presence of the village head of Abak Oko village, Etteidung Udo Ukpog Udoessien as well as his counterpart in Nsiak village, Etteidung Aniefon Edet Udo and the village head of Utu Edem Usung, Etteidung Akpan Offiong Eyeneusung for their commitment and honoring the invitation to receive his Lordship on his Pastoral visit.



Arm Forces Remembrance Day: Clergyman Urges The Military To Protect, Defend, Not Suppress

By Anselm James Akpan

A clergyman has admonished members of the Nigerian Armed Forces to protect and defend the nation and its citizens rather than suppress them. He stated this during the Thanksgiving Mass for the 2024 Arm Forces Remembrance day held at Assumption Parish, Ikpe Annang recently. The occasion was the gathering of the Nigerian legion and the Who is Who in Essien Udim L. G.A. to honor the fallen Nigerian soldiers who lost their lives in active service in defense of the nation and its citizens.

Delivering a homily at the occasion, the Clergyman Rev Fr. Stephen Udo noted that the event which usually falls on the

15th day of January of every year, is marked out for both Christians and Muslims to thank God and pray for the repose of those soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the unity and peace of the nation. While congratulating the Nigerian Legion on their annual remembrance, he admonished all force men to serve the nation with the fear of God maintaining that those who fear the Lord need not stumble. Je therefore challenged them to always remember that victory comes from God alone.

Reflecting on the readings of the day, the clergyman noted that it was only through the instrumentality of Eli that Samuel could answer God's

call. He therefore admonished the faithful to make it their duty to help the young and the ignorant to appreciate God's call.

Fr. Udo further explained that God continues to call people today and that by the help of others one can respond faithfully to God. The man of God said that when one answers God call, he has the responsibility to lead others to God as Andrew did.

The Transition Chairman of Essien Udim Local Government Council, Hon Anthony Luke, who was represented by his Vice, Mr. Imo Etim Asuquo thanked God for the grace granted upon them to Gather at ikpe Annang for the

thanksgiving. He thanked the Parish Priest and the the parishioners of Assumption Parish for their acceptance to hold the thanksgiving. He further thanked the people of Ikpe Annang for their support. In the same vein, he congratulated members of Nigerian Legion, Essien Udim Chapter for their dedication to service until their retirement, noting" The Arm Forces Remembrance Day Celebration/ Thanksgiving is an annual event set out to celebrate the living as well as remember and pray for the soul of the dead military men who loosed their life for our sake. He prayed for



God's blessings upon them, and prayed for a happy repose of those departed souls.

The event was attended by many dignitaries among whom were; the Transition Chairman, Essien Udim Local Government Council ably represented by his

Vice, Hon. Imo Etim Asuquo, the wife of the Council Chairman, Dr. (Mrs.) Imoh Anthony Luke, the council secretary Hon. Uduak Innocent Umoh, other dignitaries from the Local Government Council as well as leaders of thoughts.

Thanksgiving Mass: Rev Fr. Ifiok Umana (SSJ) Celebrates In Home Parish

By Anselm Akpan

It was all joy in St. Mary's Catholic Church Ikot Atasung/Ikot Obongototo as Rev.Fr. Ifiok Iniobong Umana (SSJ) celebrated first thanksgiving Mass in his home Parish.

In a sermon at the event, Rev.Fr. Victor Nyoroh CM thanked the recently ordained priest from Ikot Atasung /Ikot Obong Otoro for his patience and endurance while undergoing training for the priesthood in Washington. He thanked the St. Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart for accepting Ifiok and ordaining him for the service of the Church.

The homilist enjoined the priest to maintain his promises of obedience, chastity and poverty and above all to be humble and

respectful to his superiors saying "give respect to whom respect is due".

Fr. Nyoroh admonished the priest's family to support their son to perform his priestly duties prayerfully and materially even as he thanked them for the training and exemplary life given to Fr. Ifiok during his childhood, both in character and in actions, noting that without such training, Fr Ifiok may not have succeeded in a foreign land.

The homilist warned the celebrant to "remember there will be trials, and tribulations, but there is victory at the end. Involve wisdom and prudence in your endeavors and maintain a good relationship with

God, the Church and your family".

The Parish Priest, Very Rev. Fr. Johnbosco Ekanem welcomed everyone the great occasion, and congratulated Fr. Ifiok on his ordination as a Catholic Priest and for his first Thanksgiving Mass in his home parish. He prayed God to grant him the grace to serve well in his vineyard.

He thanked the parents of the new priest for their training, supports and sponsorship given to Fr. Ifiok during his formation and journey to priesthood.

He further thanked the faithful of Ikot Atasung Ikot Obong Otoro Parish and guests who have come to grace the occasion.

In his congratulatory address, the Parish Laity president, Mr. Paul M Udom, expressed profound gratitude to God for raising their son, Fr. Ifiok to the order of priesthood in St. Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart. He further said, the entire parish feel delighted to receive him as one of the missionaries from St. Mary, Ikot Atasung/ Ikot Obong Otoro Parish.

His words, "Dear Fr. Ifiok, we are very proud of you for willingly allowing God to use you as a vessel of blessings to our generation, especially at a time when most young people have very little or no regards to God. We are very optimistic that your life and close

interactions with your younger brothers and sisters will in no distance time spur many to priesthood and religious life. We pray God to make you a good priest and true ambassador of our Parish in particular and the Diocese at large. March on with all virtues of a good priest, noting that the road may not always be rosy, but be rest assured that the Lord who called you to work in his vineyard will not abandon you".

The chairman of the occasion Barr. Abom Ephraim Okon thanked God for choosing Fr. Ifiok to work in his vineyard as a missionary for the sustainability of the Catholic Church. He further admonished all to support the priest in carrying out his primary functions and as a priest, for a priest is not of his own, but for the whole world.

The visibly elated celebrant, Rev. Fr. Ifiok Umana expressed gratitude to God for making the day successful.

He further thanked everyone ranging from his Parish Priest, Very Rev. Fr. JohnBosco Ekanem, all the priests, his biological parents, to those in the formative team at various stages of his seminary training till his ordination into the CATHOLIC priesthood.

In a special way, he expressed his profound gratitude to the ordaining prelate Most Rev. Dr. John H. Richard; the Josephite superior. He prayed God to bless everyone as he promised to pray consistently for the growth of the church. In concluding his speech, he donated a golden chalice, and four

sound professional speakers to the church as a token of thanksgiving and appreciation to God.

Rev. Fr. Ifiok affectionately known as Padre Sapientia was born on October 16, 1992 into the family of Mr. and Mrs. Iniobong Aloysius Umana of Abak Ifia, Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. He received his primary education at Monica kindergarten and elementary school Ikot Ekpene. He received his secondary education and catholic formation at Queen of Apostle Seminary Afaha Obong Abak. In pursuit of his calling of the priesthood, Fr. Wisdom obtained a Bachelor of ARTS in Philosophy from the university of Ibadan, Nigeria, and a Masters of Divinity from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, USA.

On December 3, 2022, he was ordained a deacon. On June 3rd 2023 he was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest for the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart by his Lordship Most Rev. Dr. John H. Richard, SSJ Bishop emeritus of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida, USA, and the Superior General of the Josephite society.

Fr. Wisdom draws inspiration from the quotes "One with God is a majority" and "Attitude is all that matters", along with his favorite Bible verse, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, the door will be opened to you" (Mathew 7:7).

He is known for his wisdom, practicality, and dedication social to justice.

Jubilation As Ikpe Ikot Nkon/Itu Mbonuso Becomes Full-fledged Parish

By Edidiong Ima

Holy Family Qusai Parish, Ikpe Ikot Nkon has become full fledged Parish. The Catholic Bishop of Ikot Ekpene, Most Rev Camillus Umoh upgraded the territory to a substantive Parish during his Pastoral / Catedraticum Visit to the area on the Solemnity of Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2024. The Bishop confirmed Rev Fr Akaninyene Umoh as the first Parish Priest of the New Parish, thanking him for his selfless sacrifices towards the development of the Parish within the few years of his apostolate. He congratulated him for emerging the first parish priest. Appreciating the works of the Parish Priest, the Bishop described him

as a good shepherd who looks after his sheep and their wellbeing. Bishop Umoh noted that the territory was conceived as an area slatted for penance, but with the excellent works of Fr. Akaninyene Umoh, the story has changed.

Drawing inspiration from the reading, the Bishop, in his homily dwelt on the theme, "Light and Darkness". He urged the faithful to really understand, not only the meaning but the symbolic significance of light and darkness. According to him, light signifies life, peace, love, happiness, unity and progress while darkness epitomized Satan and all his works, woes, troubles, failures, hatred, wickedness and death. He

urged every good Christian, irrespective of denomination, to flee from darkness and embrace the Light – Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Pastoral Visit witnessed the wedding of Mr. Iniobong Udo Eko and his bride. The Bishop schooled the couples who were to wed during the ceremony on the "dos and don'ts" of marriage even as he admonished them to create time for their children so as to monitor their actions and teach them good morals. He said, "This is the most powerful artilleries to reverse the evil wing blowing astray the present generation". He prayed that the couple's marriage be founded on genuine love, sympathy and empathy.

The Pastoral Visit yielded fruits as the Bishop

welcomed back into the Catholic Church, two persons who had left the church for a long while. He received them back with joy and commended their courage for taking the bold step to come back to the Church, the Light of the World.

Further, the clergyman commended the parishioners for their efforts and congratulated them for working so hard to change the people's perception about them and winning the trophy at last. Finally, he encouraged all the parishioners to continue to be dedicated to God and keep believing the faith as their parish have been elevated to the full-fledge parish. The event featured: Baptism, Confirmation and recognition of Ambassador of Faith.

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WHEN VALENTINE DAY COINCIDES WITH ASH WEDNESDAY

The year 2024 will not be forgotten in a hurry where the Lenten season is concerned. It is one of the few years when Lent begins on Valentine day. Those who know the implication of Valentine day and the way it has been celebrated over the years would understand the concern as regards celebrating Ash Wednesday on Valentine day.

Right from the 14th Century, Valentine day has been a day associated with romantic love. It has grown into a day of exchange of flowers and gifts by couples to express the love they have for each other. It is interesting to note that the Valentine exchange of love is very opposed and indeed totally contrary to the spirit of Lent. The Lenten period is a period of self sacrifice, alms giving and prayers and intercession for the forgiveness of sins. Thus when the Valentine Day coincides with such a solemn day, it becomes necessary to guide the faithful Christian on how to approach the celebrations.

Ash Wednesday and Valentine Day last shared the same date in 2018. It happened three other times in the last century - 1923, 1934 and 1945. It will happen again in 2029, but that will be it for this century. So it is a rare occurrence for Ash Wednesday, to coincide with Valentine Day. But when it does, the Christian needs to know the differences in degree of the two.

*It is important to note immediately that the Catholic Church does not have St. Valentine Day in her Liturgical Calendar since after the Second Vatican Council. Since 1969, the Feast of St Valentine was relegated from the General Roman Calendar to particular (local or even national) calendars because apart from his name, nothing is known of Saint Valentine; there is a lack of clarity surrounding his origins. The Church has recognized at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, and all were martyred. Thus Valentine Day is neither a memoria, nor a feast nor solemnity in the General Roman Calendar. The General Roman Calendar states that **February 14** is the obligatory memorial of **Sts. Cyril and Methodius**. However, some Christian denominations like the Anglican and Lutheran Churches celebrate St. Valentine on February, 14.*

Despite this change, the Catholic Church acknowledges the spirit behind the celebration of St. Valentine Day which is the celebration of love. The celebration was originally intended to promote the value of love between couples. This love was usually marked by presentation of gifts like flowers, visitations and sharing. Such is the love behind the celebration of Valentine day; such is the love expected of Christians.

Unfortunately, the day has metamorphosed from the celebration of genuine love to the celebration of immorality. The focus of the celebration has shifted from showing perfect love to mankind through care giving, visitation and gifts to some unacceptable social practices. A keen observer would appreciate that the secular world has taken over the celebration of Valentine Day to promoting promiscuity and debauchery in the name of love. It is as if February 14 has been set aside as a day of engaging in immoral activities. Scores of people see valentine Day as the day to activate illicit love affairs without recourse to the spirituality behind the celebration. This abuse of the celebration gives credence to the Church relegating it from the General Calendar because the Church does not condone immorality.

However, the feast of St. Valentine has gained prominence as a social celebration all over the world and Catholics, especially couples and youths are understandably influenced by the celebration. It is not uncommon to see Parishes and other Catholic Organizations like the youths organizing to celebrate Valentine Day with members. Sometimes this is done to give the Catholics room to express themselves in a respectable manner as opposed to what obtains in the secular society. Some Parishes organize Valentine Day dinner to bring the parishioners together. They use the

occasion to emphasize on the virtue of love, unity and togetherness in families and among groups. In some cases resource persons may be invited to speak to the people on topics and issues relating to love, friendship and sacrifice. Despite this, for 2024, Ash Wednesday should take precedence to such gathering.

From the very character of the Lenten Season, it becomes clear that the fact that Ash Wednesday falls on February 14, does not in any way diminish the celebration of the Lenten observances on that day. The Character of Ash Wednesday calls us to repentance and conversion. Ash Wednesday starts the season of Lent; the season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The import of the day to Christian spirituality and morality gives no room for relaxation of Ash Wednesday obligations to valentine Day. It remains a day of fasting and abstinence especially from meat. It is a day of penitence and sobriety and does not admit of any licentiousness.

What is reflected upon on Ash Wednesday is the great love God showed to mankind by sending his Son to be the atonement for our faults. By his suffering and death, Jesus reveals that God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). So rather than celebrate mundane love, a selfish and self-destruct love, we celebrate the love of God revealed to man; we reflect on the sacrifice of love which Jesus made for our salvation; we reflect on the redeeming love of God.

Unfortunately some people so idolize Valentine Day that they may feel that Ash Wednesday should be suspended or better still shifted to another day so that they could wallow in their immoral acts. The Christian that prefers Valentine Day to Ash Wednesday can only be said to act out of ignorance or lack of faith.

Ash Wednesday is such a solemn day that begins the forty day of penitence. Along with reminding us of our mortality, the ashes on Ash Wednesday are also symbolic of grief; grief for the sins we have committed. We may not always be able to resist temptation as Jesus did, but Lent provides an opportunity to reflect, pray and repent of our sins. The 40-day period of Lent between Ash Wednesday and Easter is a time to reflect on our sinful humanity and the sacrifice Jesus did for our sins. While the ashes remind us that we will die and return to the ground, if we believe in Jesus, we will be raised with Him in glorious new bodies.

Jesus used fasting and prayer to strengthen his faith during his temptation in the desert, we, too, can receive power and strength through these practices. The Church calls us not only to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Fridays of Lent, Lent is a valuable time of abstaining from specific foods, social media, television or other indulgences to focus on reviving and rejuvenating our spiritual life through reflection on the suffering and death of Christ. This is where the great anti-thesis between Ash Wednesday and Valentine Day lies. For whereas on Valentine Day we wine and dine, engage the social media unlimited and indulge in actions opposed even to the gospel values, Ash Wednesday calls us to sober reflection through fasting and abstinence.

We therefore encourage all Christians to play down on Valentine Day celebration, be sober and be united with the Church and observe Ash Wednesday and the Lenten practices.

The Feast Of The Presentation

Forty days after Christmas, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, an event that the evangelist Luke recounts in Chapter 2 of his Gospel. In the East, the celebration of this feast dates back to the 4th century. By the year 450, it was called The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord because Jesus enters the Temple and “meets” the priests, as well as Simeon and Anna, representatives of the people of God. Around the middle of the 5th century, we know the feast was also celebrated in Rome. At a certain point, the blessing of candles was added to this feast to recall that Jesus is the “light to the gentiles”. Thus, this feast is also sometimes referred to as Candlemas.

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” (Lk. 2:22-25, 27-32)

Why is the Presentation of Jesus important?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 529) teaches,

The presentation of Jesus in the temple shows him to be the firstborn Son who belongs to the Lord. With Simeon and Anna, all Israel awaits its encounter with the Savior—the name given to this event in the Byzantine tradition. Jesus is recognized as the long-expected Messiah, the “light to the nations” and the “glory of Israel,” but also “a sign that is spoken against.” The sword of sorrow predicted for Mary announces Christ's perfect and unique oblation on the cross that will impart the salvation God had “prepared in the presence of all peoples.”

It is also important to note that, as a poor family, the Holy Family gave an offering of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. However, the Lamb whom they brought to the Temple was the Lamb of God.

Why is it called Candlemas Day?

This is the day when candles are blessed in the Church and traditionally have been lit in celebration of the feast.

Pope St. John Paul II said, “Christian traditions of the East and West have been interwoven, enriching the liturgy of this feast with a special procession in which the light of candles both large and small is a symbol of Christ, the true Light who came to illumine his people and all peoples.”

How many days after Christmas is Candlemas celebrated?

Candlemas is celebrated 40 days after Christmas. According to Leviticus 12, women should be purified 40 days after a son's birth (33 days after the boy's

circumcision) and 80 days after a daughter's birth. The purification was ritual, and preparatory to worship, in this case after the momentous events of childbirth and the time of rest or “laying in” afterwards.

Is Candlemas the end of Christmas?

In the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, the liturgical forms and calendar as revised after the Second Vatican Council, the last day of the Christmas Season is the Baptism of Our Lord, when His hidden life ended and His public ministry began.

However, the Church maintains an Extraordinary Form of the Latin Rite which utilizes the forms and calendar in use prior to the Council. In this usage, the Christmas Season continues until the Feast of the Presentation.

What is the significance of Candlemas Day?

Pope St. John Paul II said, The prophetic words spoken by the aged Simeon shed light on the mission of the Child brought to the temple by his parents: “Behold this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against ... that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:34-35). To Mary Simeon said: “And a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Lk 2:35). The hymns of Bethlehem have now faded and the cross of Golgotha can already be glimpsed; this happens in the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered. The event we are commemorating today is thus a bridge as it were, linking the two most important seasons of the Church's year.

What is the World Day for Consecrated Life?

The Presentation is celebrated in the Church as the World Day for Consecrated Life. Pope St. John Paul II instituted this annual celebration in 1997 as a day of prayer for religious men and women and other consecrated persons. This recalls the special offering which they have made to the Lord through their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In Rome, the Holy Father celebrates a special Mass for them at St. Peter's, which the religious living in Rome attend.

Pope Benedict XVI said, The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is an eloquent image of the total gift of one's life for all those, men and women, who are called to represent “the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata, n. 1) in the Church and in the world, through the evangelical counsels. For this reason Venerable John Paul II chose today's Feast to celebrate the Annual World Day of Consecrated Life.

What does the Purification of Mary mean?

The purification was ritual, preparatory to worship, in this case after the momentous events of childbirth and the time of rest or “laying in” afterwards. Thus, the Jewish priest purified himself by bathing before entering the holy place, and, similarly, the priest at Mass washes his hands before beginning the Eucharistic Prayer and handing the Body and Blood of Christ.

Mary, although morally pure, fulfilled her religious obligations by being purified 40 days after Jesus'

birth. Throughout her life, the Blessed Mother was always obedient to God's Will, in this case expressed through the laws given to Israel through Moses.

The Figures: Simeon and Anna

“In the mysterious encounter between Simeon and Mary, the Old and New Testaments are joined. Together the aging prophet and the young mother give thanks for this Light which has kept the darkness from prevailing. It is the Light which shines in the heart of human life: Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world, 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of his people Israel.’” – Pope St. John Paul II

The meeting with Simeon

“He came in the Spirit into the temple”. This is a detail that must be highlighted. Simeon is moved by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This explains how he “recognizes” Jesus as the Awaited One, the light of the Gentiles. He is the Light before whom one needs to take a stand: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world...but the world did not know him” (Jn. 1:9, 10).

A sword will pierce your heart

Simeon blesses both parents, but addresses his words only to the Baby's Mother. The Baby will be a sign of contradiction: Jesus is the light of the world, but He will be rejected. Jesus will be admired and loved, but He will be crucified, defeated. He will die and rise. He will trod the way of contradiction that will pierce His Mother's heart.

The meeting with Anna

The Prophetess Anna arrives in the Temple too. From the details the Evangelist gives, it is evident that she too is a godly woman. She is elderly, a widow. Her being a “prophetess”, allows her to discern what others find it difficult to see: the presence of God. She knows how to go beyond appearances in order to see the Baby her people have been waiting for.

Wonder

The average age at Jesus' time was approximately 40 years. But Luke says that both Simeon and Anna were “elderly”. People who are elderly generally live on their memories. They are nostalgic for times gone by. It is the young, instead, who live in hope, who look to the future. In this case, we find before us two old people who, before this Child, look toward the future, who expect something, who are awestruck. They sing of joy and hope. These details make us understand how young at heart they were because God and His promises dwelt in their hearts – and God does not disappoint.

Prophets

We too are involved in this “vision” because all who live the Gospel are and will be signs of contradiction. Courage is required to take a stand before the Lord Jesus, the “Light for revelation”. Even more so, this requires first of all being “of God”, like Simeon and Anna. Furthermore, it requires an awareness that everything will not always be completely clear. After all, Joseph and Mary were “amazed” by what was said. But, as we know, before this difficulty, Mary “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart”.

News

“Bad Timing”: SECAM President Says Fiducia Supplicans “Damaging” To Synodal Process

By Magdalene Kahiu

Fiducia Supplicans

(FS), the declaration that the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith (DDF) released permitting the blessing of “same-sex couples” and couples in other “irregular situations”, after the October 2023 Synod on Synodality conversations in Rome is “damaging” to

the synodal process, an African Cardinal has said.

In a press conference at the end of the joint meeting between representatives of the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE),

Fridolin Cardinal Ambongo said the release of the Vatican document on December 18 was viewed by many as a fruit of the synod conversations.

“The timing, the moment when this document was published, was damaging for the synodal process,” the SECAM President said

Thursday, January 25.

Cardinal Ambongo added that FS “brought discredit to the synod, to synodality.”

He said, “In the first session, the synod dealt with all these issues, but the synod did not decide. So the publication of this document, between the two sessions of the Synod, was seen by most

people as if it was the fruit of the synod, when it had nothing to do with the synod.”

“There are some who have made the connection that the Synod on Synodality means approval of homosexual couples and homosexuality,” the Archbishop of Kinshasa in the Democratic

Republic of Congo (DRC) said.

Since its release, FS has evoked mixed reactions and deep division among Catholic Bishops across the world. The Prefect of DDF called upon each Bishop to “make discernment” on implementing FS.

Cont'd On Page 10

Catechism Lesson For The Month Of February, 2024

Catechetical Theme For The Year 2024

In our catechesis at the first month of the year, we undertook a brief introduction into the background of “You are the salt of the earth...” We noted that the statement of Jesus was made at the context of his Sermon on the Mount. We maintained that the beatitudes teaches the basic tenet of Christian living, that apart from preserving the values of the teachings of Jesus, the value of Christianity, the disciple was to season the world through love, through bearing persecution, to ensure that their lives are heaven bound. Salt and light, are used as metaphors in the context. We stated that the disciples were so familiar with the diverse uses of salt in their daily lives to understand immediately what Jesus meant.

We noted also that Jesus may have meant that His disciples are called to preserve the world against moral and spiritual decay; in a world constantly in challenge of the evil one and concluded by saying that God has created us to make positive impacts in the world by living righteous lives.

In this edition, we itemize the catechetical topics which are drawn from the theme “You are the Salt of the Earth. You are the light of the World” to be treated in the course of the Year.

YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH, YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Within the context of his Sermon on the Mount where Jesus declared the Beatitudes, he defined the identity of the disciples and their relationship and role in the world. He maintained that the disciples are salt and light of the universe. Let us read what Jesus said as he addressed his disciples and the crowd,

“You are the Salt of the Earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on the hill top cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”(Matt5:13-16)

Four themes can be drawn from this statement thus:

- The identity of the Christian – “You are the Salt of the Earth... You are the Light of the world”
- The possibility of losing their identity – “But if salt loses its taste what can make it salty again?”
- The consequences of loss of identity for the Christian – “It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot”
- How to maintain the Christian identity as salt and light. “A city built on the hill top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and but it under a bushel...Let your light shine...”

The identity of a disciple is stated categorically in the saying “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. Such a categorical statement need no interpretation. Here Jesus was not speaking in parables. His use of the metaphoric statement was aimed at defining the character and identity of the disciples. Jesus himself and those who heard him were very familiar with the properties of salt and light, and their various usages. Therefore the statement was not difficult for the disciples to grasp the import. They understood well that following Jesus means being the flavor of the world and preserving the world from decay. Ascribing identity of salt and light to his disciples was nothing short of his expectation and understanding of what discipleship is. A disciple is salt to the extent he flavors and preserves the world from moral decay that was latent even in the early days. He is light to the extent he is able to guide the society in the right path

Jesus knew that there was a possibility of his disciples losing that connection with him. Such a loss of connection with the Lord tantamount to salt losing its saltiness, and the light being put under a bushel. He himself had experienced one of his disciples losing this connection when Judas betrayed him and latter committed suicide. He warned Peter to be strong in faith.

Losing the “saltiness and lightness” of discipleship means disconnect from the Master. The consequence of the loss is very grave. It is almost irreversible “What can make it salty again?” There is therefore the urgent need to let our light shine to the glory of the Father.

From these, we can draw a possible outline for our Catechesis for the year. Based on the aforementioned themes, we shall direct our catechesis along these topics

- PART ONE: The Identity of the Christian as Salt and Light of the world**
 - The Church as the salt of the earth and light of the world
 - Ways the Church demonstrate image of salt and light
 - The Christian constituted salt and light through the Sacraments
 - The Mission of the Christian as Salt and Light of the World.
- PART TWO: The Possibility of losing the Christian identity**
 - Living as Salt and Light
 - How to maintain the Christian Identity of Salt and Light
 - The Consequences of losing the salt and light identity
- PART THREE: The Laity as Salt and Light**
 - The Role of the Laity in the mission of the Church
 - The need for lay participation in the Political and Social arena
 - The Role of the Youths as Salt and Light (Message of St John Paul II on world youth day 2002)

4. Conclusion

It is our hope that at the end of our Catechesis for the year, our Christian lives must have been reawaken to our responsibilities as salt of the earth and light of the world.

CATECHESIS FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY, 2024

A. THE IDENTITY OF THE CHRISTIAN AS SALT AND LIGHT

a) THE CHURCH AS SALT OF THE EARTH AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD

We begin our Catechesis for the Month with Part 1: **The Identity of the Christian as salt and light of the world.** Let us read again the statement of Jesus in Matt 5:13-16 above.

As mentioned in our January edition, Jesus addressed this statement to his disciples and the crowd he was teaching at the top of the mountain. Those disciples and the crowd are the representation of the Church learning at the feet of the Lord. We know that the Church grew out of the disciples of the Lord therefore the identity of salt and light ascribed to the disciples is identity given to the Church by Christ. Since the Church grew out of the Disciples of Christ who were addressed by the Lord, it is appropriate to apply this saying to the Church with the conclusion that by this saying, Jesus referred to the Church he founded as the SALT of the earth and LIGHT of the world.

Within the context of its teaching on the Church as the People of God, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, defining the characteristic of the Church identifies the mission of the Church as “salt of the earth and light of the world. This people is “a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race” (CCC, 782). The image of the Church as salt and light means that the Church is the beacon of hope, unity and salvation to the world. The Catechism maintains: “To reunite all his children scattered and led astray by sin, the father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation” CCC, 845. Thus all salvation come from Christ the Head, through the Church which is his Body.

The opening statement of the Vatican II Decree on Missionary Activities, *Ad Gentes* refers to the Church as salt of the earth and light of the world. “In the present state of affairs, out of which there is arising a new situation for mankind, the Church, being the **salt of the earth and the light of the world** (cf. Matt. 5:13-14), is more urgently

called upon to save and renew every creature, that all things may be restored in Christ and all men may constitute one family in Him and one people of God.”

Again, in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Theology in 2002, Pope St. John Paul II also referred to the Church as salt of the earth and light of the world. In his words, “In the Church, salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt 5:13-14), theological reflection carries out its task to respond to the universal saving will of God who desires “all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (1Tim 2:4). Thus, by being salt of the earth and light of the world, the Church exerts a positive visible force in the world.

From the Documents quoted above, it is clear that the Church as salt and light has the inherent responsibility to ensure that the message of salvation reaches to the ends of the earth. It is within this context that we talk of the Church as Missionary. The Catechism states that “the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole human race. (831). The Vatican II Document, *Ad Gentes* defines the missionary nature of the Church. The document begins with the categorical statement: “The pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin in accordance with the decree of God the Father (1).

Thus the missionary endeavors of the Church can be better appreciated within the context of the Church as Salt and light of the world. To be able to carry out her missionary mandate, **the Church** has a preserving presence among the nations. Her presence preserves and flavors the world to prevent its decay. The Church as light of the world is the guide that leads all peoples to the truth. It is within this context that we see the mission of the Church as bearing salvation to mankind.

Vatican II maintains that “The Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods, under Christ the Head in the unity of the Holy Spirit” (Lumen Gentium, 13, 1-2). Thus the Church continues the mission of Christ who came to die for the nations and to gather into one the dispersed children of God (John 11:52). The mission of the Church is to bring about the forgiveness of sins and peace with God that Jesus brings through His life, death, and resurrection. She does this through her influence in the world in many different ways, including political involvement, providing help to the poor, and other ways that demonstrate compassion for the needy.

She is the conscience of the world. The Church seeks to propose the Truth which gives guiding light to all people in their search for meaning and purpose. She is directly involved in the circumstances of daily life in the world today. The Church makes known the presence of Christ and his Teaching, by proclaiming the gospel of life and charity through her social works. As the salt of the earth, the Church stands to correct the ills of the society. She seeks to end attacks on human life, eliminates the cause of poverty, and upholds the dignity of the human person. The Church as salt of the earth seeks peace on earth. This is why the Church celebrates World day of Peace with Papal messages for over 56 years now. The church as salt and light leads the secular society by ensuring good governance and speaking against bad governance.

From these we can surmise as follows:

- The Church grew out of the disciples that Christ addressed as salt and light. Therefore the Church is salt and light of the world.
- This is expressed in the teaching of the Church as contained in the Catechism (782) which sees the Church as a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race.
- The first implication of the Church as salt of the earth and light of the world is that the Church is missionary by its very nature. This is expressed in the different documents of the Church and the Catechism
- The Church as salt of the earth is a beacon of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- The Church is the conscience of the Society, to make known the presence of Christ and his teaching.

For the Month of March, we shall look at the different ways the Church demonstrates the identity of salt and light of the world.

Canonical Installations Of Thirty-five Candidates During Concluding Ceremonies Of 2024 Laity Retreat At Nko



Thanksgiving Mass Of Rev. Fr. Ifioke Umana (SSJ) At St. Mary's Catholic Church Ikot Atasung/ikot Obongotoro



Thanksgiving Mass Of 2024 Army Forces Remembrance Day At Assumption Parish, Ikpe Annang



Inauguration of Newly Appointed Patrons And Patronesses For Calabar Ecclesiastical Province Catholic Lectors Association of Nigeria (CLAN) At Immaculate Conception Parish Ikot Ekpene



Silver Jubilee Grand Finale And Pastoral Visit/Catechism At St. Bernard Parish Nto Udo Enwan



**Images From
The Opening Of
St. Camillus Station
Ibesit During
Pastoral Visit/
Catechism At
Obio Ndot**



Pastoral Visit/Catechism At St. Theresa Autonomous Community Abak Oko



Pictures From 2024 MOD Celebration Of Her Father Founder At Ifuho Recently



Bishop Umoh To Can: Do Not Allow Yourselves To Be Used By Politicians

By Rev. Stephen S. Udo

The Catholic Bishop of Ikot Ekpene, Most Rev Camillus R. Umoh has admonished the Christian Association Nigeria (CAN) to work for the unity of Christians and not allow itself to be used by politicians in their desire for power. He stated this during the Courtesy Visit by the leadership of the Essien Udim Local Government Chapter of the Association.

Bishop Umoh acknowledged the efforts of CAN towards the unity of the Christians which allowed them to speak with one voice against ills in the society. He noted that by so doing the body was a prophetic voice for the nation. The Bishop maintained that “one of the very important responsibilities of CAN is to ensure that beyond particular denominations, by virtue of being

Christians, we are connected with each other”. He acknowledged that CAN have been successful in this regard. The Clergyman admonished the Essien Udim CAN executive to always keep in mind that “there must be something that unites us. We emphasize that, than what separates us”.

Bishop Umoh noted that the Father of CAN, the Late Dominic Card. Ekandem had in mind for CAN to be the instrument whereby the churches *may bear witness together to their common allegiance to Jesus Christ and cooperation in* matters affecting Christians. He reminded the CAN executive that the Late Cardinal was his predecessor as such “it is always a thing of joy for the Catholic Church to identify with CAN.

Umoh however

lamented that at a time, CAN lost focus and dabbled into politics becoming merely an arm of a political party, “it was at this point that the Catholic Church withdrew from CAN”. He maintained that the responsibility of the Association is not to be involved in politics, but to guide and direct the way politics is played in the nation. “When you are too much involved, you cannot correct. The responsibility of the Church as it was of the prophets of old is to correct. The Church exists to help those in political leadership”. He warned against allowing politicians to induce the body with money and appointments even as he emphasized that CAN must wake up and take its place as the prophetic voice of the nation Nigeria. The Bishop expressed his appreciation to the body for what they have been able to

achieve in Essien Udim L.G.A. and by inference in the State, maintaining that CAN is doing a very important work of bringing churches together to speak with one voice.

The Bishop pledged his support to the CAN projects especially in prayer and declared his readiness to give advice when needed. He said that he will encourage his priests to cooperate with CAN to work together as a body irrespective of denominations.

Earlier, the Coordinator of CAN, Essien Udim, Rev Uwem Udom had expressed his appreciation to the Bishop for accepting to see the body. He stated that the Body chose to pay the visit to the Bishop as the head of the Catholic Church in Essien

Udim and a very illustrious son of Essien Udim. He intimated the Bishop on the project of Solemn Assembly CAN proposed to hold in Essien Udim stating that the program is intended to involve all churches in the Local Government Area. He therefore requested the Bishop to encourage his flock to be involved in the program. He promised to inform the Bishop properly at the proper time.

The CAN woman leader, Elder Mrs Udom thanked the Bishop on

behalf of the group for his kind acceptance of the Executive despite the tight schedule of his activities. She acknowledged the efforts of the Bishop towards the unity of Christians in Essien Udim Local Government Area and beyond. She also relayed the promise of the body to abide by the Bishop's advice by returning to the original intention of the founders of CAN as a prophetic voice of the nation.



Cardinal Onaiyekan Sees Signs Of Progress, Vigour In Church In Africa

By Festus Tarawalie and Christopher Wells



On his 80th birthday, Nigerian Cardinal John Onaiyekan speaks with Vatican News about the voice of the Church in Africa, the need for peace, and his memories from forty years as a bishop.

The history of Africa over the past forty years has been “a tale of woes,” according to Cardinal John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan. “In fact, in many countries, things have gotten worse and worse, including my own country, Nigeria.”

But when looking at the life of the Church in Africa during that same time, the Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja continues, “there is evidence of progress. Vigour. You can see a Church, an African Church, that is really making an impact.”

Cardinal Onaiyekan, who was in Rome for his 80th birthday on Monday, visited the offices of Vatican News, where he reminisced about his long life, including forty years as a bishop, as well as the state

of the Church in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

The Church's social doctrine: a wonderful gift of God

In an interview with Festus Tarawalie, Cardinal Onaiyekan highlights the unity of the Church in Africa, especially among the Bishops. In the Catholic Church, he says, “we have a wonderful gift of God, which we often underestimate. We have a beautiful bundle of ideas and values”—the Church's social teaching—“which we often underestimate.” Nonetheless, it allows the African bishops to have “a coherent voice when we compare ourselves to other church groups. Although that voice is not always heeded, it is always eagerly anticipated, even by non-Catholics, and always heard. The Church, says Cardinal Onaiyekan, “talks about and stresses values” in a world that often refuses to take values seriously. He decried political leaders

who are “only playing games” and “have no time to even start thinking of how to solve the problems of the poor people.”

Every life is important

Speaking of the wave of violence that is sweeping Nigeria, Cardinal Onaiyekan expresses his gratitude to Vatican Radio - Vatican News and other news agencies for highlighting the issues affecting the nation. At the same time, he expresses his concern that news reports only focus on high-profile cases, often those involving clergy, while ignoring the everyday violence that touches the lives of ordinary people. “The truth must be told,” he says. “Nigeria is becoming very unsafe for everyone,” not only Christians, and not only for religious reasons.

The Cardinal insists on the need for a “minimum of good governance” that protects citizens, Christians, and Muslims alike. “I think we should do better to bring together the horror that we all should feel that life is becoming... so cheap.” On the contrary, “every life is important.”

A vocations 'boom'

Asked about the surge of vocations in Africa, Cardinal Onaiyekan says, “That one is God's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes... The important

thing is for us to recognize that the Spirit is moving, and we should do all we can to walk along” with the Spirit.

“My own conviction is that this, what I call 'vocation boom'... it's not for no reason that God has His plans,” he says. At the same time, it is important to prepare new priests “to be able to tackle the myriads of problems” they face in Nigeria and throughout Africa.

First among these is the need for peace, “because without peace, nothing can move.” The Cardinal is adamant that peace cannot be based on one group “conquering” another but must take everyone into consideration. “We cannot have peace in Africa based

on who will defeat whom. We have to look for a way of recognizing our common grounds and our common interests.”

The end of the day

The Cardinal's visit to Rome was scheduled to coincide with his 80th birthday. “Whatever I have been able to do, or whatever services the Church has made it possible for me to perform, I have now reached the end of the day.”

In a meeting with Pope Francis prior to his visit to Vatican News, Cardinal Onaiyekan says he thanked the Pope – and through him, his predecessors, “who have made it possible for me to be involved in the life of the Church at

different levels and in different areas.”

Carrying on with humility and fidelity

Describing a letter he gave to the Pope, Cardinal Onaiyekan says, “I summarized much of what I've gone through as a man of the Church, and how I have enjoyed every moment of it, and how I see whatever duties or postings that are assigned to me as a grace of God, which I really thank God for.”

Now, he says, “I'm going back home to continue my life with all humility and with fidelity to God and to the Bishop of my Diocese. “And whatever I can still do, I will do until the Lord Jesus calls me home.”

Cont'd from Page 6

“Bad Timing”: SECAM President Says....

In Africa, Catholic Bishops issued a “consolidated summary” of their responses against the possibility of blessing couples as suggested in FS.

In their five-page response to FS, SECAM members said they “do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and

would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities.”

The Catholic Bishops said the “spontaneous” and non-liturgical blessings, which FS proposes, “cannot be carried out in Africa without” causing “scandals.”

In the January 25 press conference, Cardinal Ambongo said the response of SECAM members has helped

return calm which had been disrupted by the release of FS.

“I am happy to note that since the publication of my message on January 11, calm has returned to Africa and communion has returned with Pope Francis,” the member of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap.) said, adding that FS had “created a negative situation” among Catholics and other people of God on the continent.

The Diocesan laity council is grateful to our Bishop for his empathy, love, Devine guidance and exemplary leadership to the Diocese for the past year. We are thankful to our priests, religious organizations, pious societies, sodalities, institutions and the lay faithful for their various contribution to uplift and sustain our spiritual life in this journey of faith. It is our fervent hope that this zeal will be maintained this year for the successful completion of the 60th Anniversary

Celebration of our Diocese and the preparation for the hosting of the CBCN next year in our Diocese. To facilitate the effective preparation a committee and sub - Committees has been inaugurated to commence work immediately. Parishes are equally expected to start their preparation on time to maintain the good reputation we have earned over the years.

2025 CBCN CENTRAL PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEES AND MEMBERS

8. ACCOMMODATION SUB COMMITTEE

- Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Okoro - Chairman
- Sir. Rachael Peters, HHCT
- Mr. Nicholas Umouyo
- Warden Kufre Valentine
- Engr. Augustine Nkondouk
- Sr. Mary Udonna Onike, HFSN
- Sr. Maria Chidiuto Onuoka, DDL
- Sr. Mary Immaculate Nwaka, IHM

9. FINANCE/BUDGET SUB COMMITTEE

- Very Rev. Fr. Gerald Ignatius Akata - Chairman
- Mr. Celestine Joseph Akpan
- High Chief (Sir) Joseph Akpan Adianimuwa, KSJI
- Sir Uduakobong Isobara (KSM)
- Engr. Aniebiet Raymond Udoh
- Sir (Dr.) Francis Beka (KSM)
- Mr. Emmanuel Inyangetoh
- Dr. Charles Akpan
- Lady Esitmbom Ekperikpe Ekpo
- Mr. Michael Ekerette
- Mr. John Michael Akpan
- Engr. Enobong Patrick
- Mrs. Elizabeth Idaenyin
- Sr. Anthonietta Ejezie, SJS
- Engr. Nsikus Ekanem
- Prince Raymond Akpan

10. PROTOCOL SUB COMMITTEE

- Very Rev. Fr. John Ebebe - Chairman
- Barr. Chris Okorie
- Mr. Gabriel Ekaidem
- Hon. Godwin Iyakndue
- Mrs. Emem Enamidem
- Mr. Samuel Ibanga - Secretary
- Warden Raphael Ukpog
- Prince Emmanuel Ndon
- Sr. Rosemary Umouyoh, HHCT
- Warden Kufre Valentine Akpan
- Hon. Emmanuel Essiet
- Hon. Kenneth Ekong
- The Bishop's Secretary

11. FEEDING SUB-COMMITTEE

- Lady Rosemary Pius Idiong - Chairman
- Mrs. Rosemary I. Ukoh
- Mrs. Rose Akpanwa
- Cate. Mary Ibanga
- Mrs. Inemesit Sylvester Akpan
- Lady Idongesit Cletus Udoh
- Mrs. Imelda Titus Sam
- Mrs. Patricia Namso Ekpo
- Mrs. Theresa Chris Okorie
- Mr. Martin Itoro Ekere
- Kt. Peter Isobara
- Lady Franca Bertram Adadiaha
- Rev. Fr. Donald Udoh
- Rev. Fr. Cletus Okon
- Rev. Fr. Akaninyene Umoh
- Sr. Regina Useh
- Sr. Idara Umoatta

12. TRANSPORT SUB-COMMITTEE

- Mr. Godwin Etokakpan - Chairman
- Rev. Fr. Akaninyene Umoh
- Mr. Emmanuel Alphonsus Umoh
- Warden Sylvanus Ibah
- Rev. Fr. Victor Ekong
- Rev. Fr. Patrick Ukpoh
- Cate. Ernest Inyang
- Diocesan Drivers

13. COMMUNITY LIASON SUB -COMMITTEE

- Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Udo Udo - Chairman
- Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Okoro
- Kt. Jude Ekanem (KSM)
- Mr. Joseph Emaido Akpan
- Hon. Augustine Okon Udoh
- Mr. Francis Bassey
- Kt. Nsikak Esu
- Warden Raphael Ukpog
- Warden Nsikak Essien
- Abom Tony Esu
- Chief Christopher Sam

14. TECHNICAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE

- Very Rev. Fr. Christian D. Usungurua - Chairman
- Rev. Fr. Ignatius Uba
- Mr. Jude Otu
- Mr. Samuel Atakpa
- Mr. Tony Ibora Clerton Etim
- Engr. Augustine Nkondouk
- Mr. Enobong Umoh
- Mr. Paschal Anthony
- Mr. James Vincent Akpan

15. CULTURE AND LEISURE - COMMITTEE

- Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Aniekan Akpabio - Chairman
- Kt. Boniface Ebeowo (KSM)
- Mr. Gabriel Ekaidem
- Hon. Joseph Tombere
- Prof. Nsini Ekpaidot
- Prof. Felicia Ekpu
- Mr. Michael Vincent Akpan
- Miss Josephine Uwah
- Mr. Cosmas Michael Essiet
- Rev. Sr. (Prof) Anthonia Essien - Coordinator

16. MEDIA/PUBLICITY SUB-COMMITTEE

- Rev. Fr. Stephen S. Udoh - Chairman
- Rev. Fr. Stephen M. Udoh
- Patron Damian Umofia
- Mr. Samuel Atakpa
- Dr. Namso Umoren
- Cate. Augustine Mendie
- Mr. Akanimo Gordian Essiet
- Mr. Kufre Ossoh

17. MEDICAL SUB-COMMITTEE

- Dr. Clement Essien - Chairman
- Dr. (Warden) D. D. Ukpog
- Rev. Fr. Viktor Ekanem
- Rev. Fr. Primus Umoh
- Sr. Fidelia Zabbey
- Rev. Fr. Mfon Udoh
- Mr. Donatus Akpan
- Mr. Isaac Okon
- Mrs. Anne Raphael Orok
- Dr. (Mrs.) Margaret Udofia
- Ms. Catherine Silas Archibong
- Mrs. Mercy Anthony Ekutt
- Ndipmong C. Ekanem
- Mrs. Benedette Udoh
- Dr. Michael Aaron Utin
- Rev. Fr. Canice Ekpo - Co-ordinator
- Prof. J. J. Udoh - Consultant

Sir Hon. Justice Pius B. Idiong
CPC Chairman

Mr. Simon A. Akpan
CPC Secretary

Pope Announces Year Of Prayer Leading Up To Jubilee



By Christopher Wells

At the Angelus, Pope Francis announces a “Year of Prayer” ahead of the upcoming Jubilee, and invites the faithful to pray for Christian unity and for peace throughout the world. The Holy Father also calls for the release of a group of people, including several nuns, who were kidnapped last week in Haiti.

Pope Francis has inaugurated a Year of Prayer ahead of the 2025 Jubilee, calling on the faithful “to intensify prayer to prepare us to live well this event of grace and to experience the power of God's hope.”

In remarks after the Angelus on Sunday, the Holy Father explained that the Year of Prayer is dedicated “to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer, prayer in personal life, in the life of the Church, prayer in the world.”

He added that the Dicastery for Evangelization will be preparing materials to assist in celebrating the Year.

Prayer For Christian Unity, Peace In The World

The Pope invited Christians to pray especially for Christian unity, and “to not tire of invoking the Lord for peace in Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine, and

in so many other parts of the world,” including Ecuador.

Once again he emphasized that those who suffer most from the lack of peace are the weakest among us. “I think of the little ones,” Pope Francis said, “the many children who are injured and killed, those who are deprived of affection, deprived of their dreams and their future.”

“Let us all be aware of our responsibility to pray and to build peace for them!”

Focusing on the Caribbean nation of Haiti, Pope Francis said, “I have learned with sorrow the news of the kidnapping, in Haiti, of a group of people, including six religious sisters.”

The abduction took place in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince on Friday, when armed men stopped a minibus and took the passengers hostage.

In his remarks on Sunday, the Pope appealed “earnestly” for the release of all the hostages, while praying for “social harmony” in the country. “I call on everyone to stop the violence,” he said, “which causes so much suffering to that dear population.”

What To Know About Sudden Death Syndrome

Medically reviewed by Madeline Knott, MD — By Hope Gillette on November 7, 2023

Sudden death syndrome (SDS) is a broad term that can describe any sudden, unexpected death from natural causes. It is not a formal condition or diagnosis and does not necessarily indicate a specific medical condition.

Sudden death syndrome (SDS) is an umbrella term for many biological scenarios leading to quick-onset and unforeseen mortality. The person involved often has little to no warning signs of illness. Even after death, an autopsy may not reveal obvious abnormalities.

This article explores what SDS is, its causes, and whether a person can prevent it. It also looks at commonly asked questions about SDS-related conditions.

How do doctors define SDS?: SDS is not a formal diagnosis: no set criteria universally define sudden death. However, a 2023 article suggests that many experts have adopted the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition. It states that SDS is sudden, unexpected death from natural causes witnessed within one hour of symptom onset. If not witnessed, death occurring within 24 hours of someone seen alive and symptom-free is considered SDS.

Sudden Death Syndrome Vs. Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD): People may use SDS interchangeably with sudden cardiac death (SCD), also known as sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). SCD describes death caused by loss of heart function, occurring within one hour of any cardiovascular cause. SDS and SCD have become synonymous. While many different diseases can result in a fatal chain reaction in the body, SCD is a common cause.

According to a 2022 comprehensive review, cardiovascular causes account for up to 73% of sudden deaths. This is

compared with other conditions such as asthma, epilepsy, and intracerebral hemorrhage.

Are there symptoms or warning signs of SDS?

There is no standardized list of symptoms in SDS. Since SDS is not a single illness or disease, symptoms, if any, can vary significantly depending on the underlying cause. For example, in the case of SCD, warning signs may be similar to any heart complication. Almost half of people report no symptoms of SCD. However, if symptoms are present, they may include: palpitations, dizziness, chest discomfort, shortness of breath, fainting.

Warning signs of other conditions that can lead to SDS may be subtle. For example, a person could mistake cerebral aneurysm symptoms for ordinary discomfort, such as a stiff neck or strong headache.

What causes SDS? Numerous known and unknown processes in the body can contribute to SDS. However, cardiovascular disease plays a major role overall. Sudden cardiac death (SCD) is the most common cause of SDS. It is a widely inclusive term that can describe a variety of cardiovascular events, such as sudden arrhythmia death syndromes (SADS), genetic heart conditions that alter the heart's electrical activity, potentially causing sudden cardiac arrest, heart attack, coronary spasm, anomalous coronary origin, a coronary artery that has an abnormality, Brugada syndrome, a rare, inherited condition that can lead to irregular heartbeats, long or short QT syndrome, a condition that affects the heartbeat, myocarditis, inflammation of the heart, aortic stenosis, narrowed aortic valves.

Coronary artery disease and SADS are among the most common underlying

causes. Coronary artery disease may be responsible for as many as 80% of SCD deaths. According to a large-scale cohort study, SADS accounted for 53% of reviewed SCD cases.

SDS is not limited to cardiovascular events. Examples of non-cardiac conditions that can also lead to sudden death include: epilepsy, asthma, pulmonary embolism, a blockage in the pulmonary arteries, brain hemorrhage, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), stroke, brain, aneurysm, anaphylaxis, a severe allergic reaction, hypertensive crisis, a sudden and severe increase in blood pressure, cerebral abscesses, an abscess in the brain, meningitis, inflammation of the lining that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

In many cases, the causes of SDS can never be explained. When this happens in adults, it may be referred to as sudden adult death syndrome. Similarly, unexplained infant mortality is referred to as sudden infant death syndrome.

What are the risk factors for SDS? Due to the number of conditions that can lead to SDS, individual risk factors vary significantly. Because SCD is the most common cause of SDS, its risk factors are among the most well-known. These include the general risk factors for adverse cardiac events, such as: heavy alcohol consumption, tobacco use, physical inactivity, obesity, high blood pressure, living with a chronic disease, such as diabetes or kidney disease, a family history of SCD, substance misuse.

Some causes of SDS can be heritable, or passed down through families. SADS, for example, are conditions passed down from parent to child. If a parent lives with a SADS condition, each child has a 50% chance of inheriting that condition.

Is prevention possible? It may be possible to prevent SDS through chronic disease

management and lifestyle changes. For example, people at high risk of cardiovascular events can reduce their risk with lifestyle modifications and medical treatments. Proactive disease management can also be important in preventing SDS. For someone living with a life-threatening allergy, carrying an emergency epi-pen is one way to prevent sudden death. Similarly, for certain asthma conditions, an emergency inhaler may save a person's life.

Not all sudden deaths can be prevented, however. Some conditions in SDS might not have modifiable risk factors, such as those influenced by genetics.

Frequently asked questions: Below are commonly asked questions about sudden death syndrome (SDS) and SCD.

1. Q. How common is SDS?: A Sudden deaths may account for between 150,000 and 450,000 deaths annually.

2. Is SCD painful? SCD may be accompanied by pain or discomfort immediately before heart function stops.

3. What is the most common underlying condition of SCD? Coronary artery disease is one of the most common underlying conditions in SCD. It accounts for approximately 80% Trusted Source of sudden cardiac arrests.

Summary: SDS is not a formal diagnosis. It is an umbrella term that describes unexpected, sudden, natural causes of death. SCD is the most common cause of SDS. However, other conditions can also cause SDS, such as epilepsy, cerebral hemorrhage, and asthma. It may be possible to reduce a person's chances of experiencing SDS with certain methods. These include making lifestyle modifications and treating underlying chronic diseases.

News

Nto Udo Enwan Concludes Silver Jubilee Grand Finale With Pastoral Visit/Catedraticum

By Etiusen Akpanudo

St. Bernard Parish Church, Nto Udo Enwan was agog with parishioners and guests recently as they gathered to give thanks to God for a successful celebration of Silver Jubilee of the creation of their Parish. The occasion was coupled with the Pastoral Visit of His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Camillus Umoh to the area to mark the 60th Anniversary celebration of the creation of Ikot Ekpene Diocese it was the grand finale of the jubilee celebration for the Parish.

As part of the jubilee celebration, preparatory masses were celebrated in all the villages that make the parish in order to thank God for a peaceful coexistence between the individual host communities and the church as well as praying for continued love and peace. Further, the Parish organized Seminars/retreats for the parishioners during the jubilee year to renew the spiritual life of the parishioners as they prepare

for the celebration.

The Pastoral Visit also featured the official marking of centenary celebration of Immaculate Conception station, Ito by his Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Camillus R. Umoh. At the station, the Bishop blessed and thanked the people of Immaculate Conception station and the entire people of the village for living harmoniously. He further extended his words of appreciation to the family of Sir(Engr.) Christopher Offong for donating a marble Altar and a Lectern to the station which are essential items for the Centenary Celebration.

The Bishop in his homily, called on the faithful to respond positively to God's calls just as Simon and Andrew; James and John responded to God's calls when Jesus approached them to make them fishers of men as recorded on Mark gospel chapter 1:14-20. He advised Christians not to react to the will of God the way Jonah initially did by refusing to go and preach

repentance to the people of Nineveh. Further the Bishop harped on the effectiveness of the Holy Eucharist. He taught that every sacrament has its matter and form; that without the matter and form, the Sacraments cannot be validly celebrated. To celebrate the Holy Eucharist effectively, there must be correct matter, correct form and a correct minister; the absence of any of these renders the Sacrament invalid and ineffective.

The Chief Shepherd further admonished Christians not to make mistakes in their marriage as he advised that the proper matter for marriage is one man and one woman; and that any marriage that is founded on force, deception and any other impediment is a nullity.

The occasion also witnessed celebration of the sacraments to mark the jubilee Celebration. Twenty-Five faithful received First Holy Communion on the occasion while Fifty-Three received confirmation and a

couple got wedded

The Parish priest Rev. Fr. Gabriel Umoh thanked the Local Ordinary for finding time despite his very tight schedule to visit the Parish. He appreciated the efforts of his assistant Rev. Fr. Hilary Essien and all the priests who graced the occasion. The Parish Priest also thanked both the religious and the laity together with the invited guests for identifying with the parish on the occasion of the P a s t o r a l Visit/Cathedraticum and Silver Jubilee Celebration. Fr. Umoh highlighted the physical and spiritual growth of the parish to his Lordship and beseeched the Bishop to pray for continued peace and unity among parishioners.

The parish Laity President, Mr. Francis Udo Mboro in his address thanked God for his abundant blessings upon the Parish as it completes 25 years of faithful service to God and humanity. He thanked the Bishop

immensely for gracing the occasion despite his tight schedules. He further expressed his appreciation to the Parish Priest and his assistant for their unwavering efforts towards the success of the occasion. He thanked all the priests that were present, the Diocesan Laity Council, the invited guests and indeed, the entire people of God for their wonderful contributions towards the success of the Jubilee Celebration and Pastoral Visit. The Laity President at the end led the parishioners in the presentation of cash and food items to his Lordship.

The Bishop in his remarks expressed gratitude to the parishioners, thanking them for living the faith and for the presentation of the many gift items to him. He thanked all the guests for their sincere contributions and supports and prayed God to bless them richly. Bishop Umoh congratulated the faithful that received the sacraments and all the

ambassadors of faith awardees. He stressed that the medals to the ambassadors of faith are to encourage them, appreciate them for their meritorious deeds and also as a call to do more for God, the Church and the society.

A host of dignitaries attended the occasion including the Diocesan Laity President, Sir Cypriaan Ennang and his executive, Ika Deanary President, Ika Local Government Transition Chairman and his council, the Paramount Ruler of Ika and Knights of different orders.

Prior to the celebration of the grand finale, some of the parishioners received award honour in recognition of their unalloyed supports towards the growth and development of the Parish. The Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Gabriel G. Umoh was also honoured as the "most supportive Parish Priest of Nto Udo Enwan".

Ami Ndi Eyen Katholik Series

EHB 128: Yak Isiono Ɔfɔŋ Idem Nnyin

The month of February is very significant in Catholic Liturgical circle. This is because most often the Season of Lent begins this month with the celebration of the Ash Wednesday. The Season of Lent reminds us of the sacrifice of Christ who gave himself for our salvation through his suffering and death on the Cross. It is a season that calls us to repentance. This is signified by the wearing of ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. Catholics are called upon to attend Mass on ash Wednesday and receive the ashes on their foreheads as sign of their readiness to repent and turn to God. The Hymn, *Yak Isiono Ɔfɔŋ Idem Nnyin* (EHB, 128) is a perfect hymn to begin the Lenten Season. Hence, for this month of February, as we await the beginning of the Lenten Season, we have chosen to reflect on the hymn: *Yak Isiono Ɔfɔŋ Idem Nnyin*. The English translation is ours.

Yak Isiono Ɔfɔŋ Idem Nnyin
Isine eƙpat iyere ntɔŋ utre udia
Inyur itua eyetk'iso Ɔbɔŋ
Sia Ɔbɔŋ enyenede ekese mbɔm
Ndifen mme owok'idio ƙpɔ mmɔ

Come let us go back to God without robes
Let us in ashes fast before the Lord
With all our might, let us weep:
He the Lord is merciful and kind;
He will forgive all our sins and guilt.

This hymn is one of the very short hymns in the *Catholic Efik Hymn Book*. It appears as a single stanza hymn (with 5 lines) which is to be repeated like a refrain or antiphon. It is also listed among the Sorrowful Hymns (*Ikwɔ Mfuhɔ*) in the *Efik Hymnal* (nos. 126 – 133). The English equivalent of this hymn is not found; neither is the composer known. However, what is sure about the hymn is that it has a biblical undertone and, as such, could best be understood within that context. The composer must have been inspired by the Prophecy of Joel: “Yet even now – Oracle of the Lord – return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment...” (Joel 2:12-14a). It also re-echoes the action of the King of Nineveh who, upon hearing the

decreed that every person under his rule should do same with the hope that God would see their sorrow and repent from punishing them (cf. 3:8-9). God actually did.

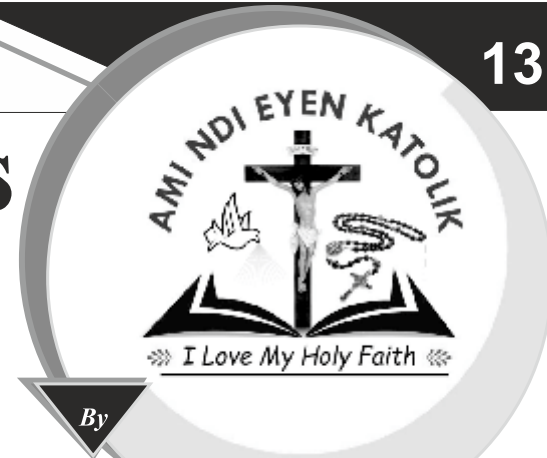
The first word “yak” (let us) gives it a communal undertone. One could hear the ‘voice’ of a king, an elder or a leader addressing the assembled community. When sung within the liturgy, it makes even more sense; for within the liturgy, the priest or the head of the liturgical assembly could be heard inviting members of the worshipping community to some penitential actions. The hymn is basically a song of penitence; it is sung as a response to the call for conversion. This hymn is, therefore, proposed and recommended for the liturgy of Ash Wednesday and the entire Season of Lent. More specifically, it could be the first hymn during the imposition of ashes. This hymn, when rendered in the traditional tune, can put

call to conversion from Jonah, “rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes” (Jonah 3:6) and also

the faithful in the mood of penitence while also introducing solemnity to the action.

Although the hymn has very few lines, its theological content is rich. The hymn reminds everyone that our God is merciful. God is merciful to anyone who hears His words and repents from doing evil. Our God is merciful and He appreciates human efforts towards repentance. In *The book of the Prophet Jonah*, we read that He saw the “effort” of the Ninevites and forgave them. Apart from the imposition of ashes, the hymn also highlights other traditionally recommended penitential acts like fasting (*utre udia*). Fasting is also emphasised within the Lenten season alongside praying which could also be said to be echoed in the word “weeping” (*ntua eyet*). The Lord Himself has assured us that: “if a wicked person turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; he will not die.” (Ezekiel 18: 21). God does not take any pleasure in the death of the wicked; He is rather pleased when they turn from their ways and live (cf. Ezekiel 18: 23). Let us return to God through this hymn!

Hymn no. 128 remains a classic for penitential hymns. It is our wish that the message of this hymn would inspire true conversion in everyone and guide us through the Lenten period.



By
Fr. Dominic Isaac Akpan

News

MOD Celebrates Her Father Founder - As Chaplain Inaugurates New Regular Council Members, Others Bag Award

By **Susana Clement**



The Men of Order and Discipline Movement of Nigeria [MOD], Ikot Ekpene Diocese gathered in numbers to celebrate her founder, Late Very Rev. Msgr. O. P. Achebe recently. The annual celebration which took place at St. Anne Cathedral Ifuho was very significant in the evolution of MOD in the diocese. The occasion began with the Holy Mass celebrated by the Chaplain of the Movement, Rev. Fr. Brig. Gen. Maurice Asuquo within which the Regular Council members were inaugurated.

In his homily, the Diocesan MOD Chaplain, took time to charge the inaugurated members and indeed all MOD members

present to be committed, dedicated and of good behavior propagating the discipline they profess in the movement. He charge them to always reflect upon the pledge they made when they were first commissioned which according to him was “To be of strong faith abounding with charity in good conscience, To be a practicing Catholic all through life, To learn her doctrines and morals and to love liturgy, To spread and transmit the same to all around them and to be a citizen of order and discipline, To live and die a good example.”

The man of God mentioned that by virtue of baptism, the faithful are constituted by God as prophet to participate in the

prophetic ministry of Christ who is the true Prophet. He noted that ‘like Christ we are to drive away every negative force against development and progress’. He listed these forces to include, enmity, pride, backstabbing, assault, criminal act and many others. Fr. Asuquo noted that the movement has brought a lot of positive transformation to the Diocese in the area of maintenance of security especially during functions in Parishes where they are found and in the Diocese. He stated that the aim of MOD is evangelization through maintenance of security even as he warned members to stay away from committing any crime under the coverage of the uniform.

The Chaplain noted that the MOD movement is a voluntary organization in the Church. He therefore appealed for membership from good spirited persons ready to sacrifice for the security of the Church. The Chaplain solicited for sponsorship from those who could act as Patrons even as he appealed to the Diocesan

Laity Council and other arms of the Church for support to procure security gadgets to enhance their mission of security through evangelization..

In his goodwill message, the Diocesan Laity President Sir Cyprian Enang expressed gratitude to the MOD Chaplains and Patrons for seeing the need to establish the movement in the Diocese, to groom the youths in maintaining security in different parishes and the diocese.

Speaking on behalf of the Patrons, Prof. Nsini Ekpaidot thanked God for the success of the event, He emphasized that the patrons are ready to assist the movement financially and otherwise. He urged the three arms of the movement to collaborate among themselves for better growth by working in synergy and unity.

Highpoint of the celebration was the inauguration of regular council members, presentation of award to the pioneer Chaplain, Rev. Fr. Edidiong Ben, the MOD

Patron, Major Bernard Uko KSJI, and some Regular Council members, Otu Robert Akpan, Ekemini Akpanudo, Blessing George and Michael Justice Etor. There was also the vesting of “Directorate of Security and Intelligence [DSI]” outfit to Emmanuel E. Uko as well as commissioning of the flags of the universal church, of Nigeria and the MOD Movement.

Side attraction included parade by the members with their Karky-colored uniform in the pattern of the Police or Military force. Their uniform and stylish entry into the Cathedral Premises

was a scene better experience than told as their appearance kept all the sundry spell-bound.

It would be recall that the Men of Order and Discipline Movement is a paramilitary outfit of the Church founded by Lat Msgr. O. P. Achebe in 1987. Its goal is to enhance the physical, mental and spiritual development of the youths in the Church through regular training for the maintenance of peace and security especially during ceremonies in the Church.



BENEFITS OF EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

Devotion to the Holy Eucharist is at the very heart of Catholic life. In his first message to the Church after his election, Pope Benedict XVI said that the Eucharist is “the heart of Christian life and the source of the Church's evangelizing mission”. As we know, Pope John Paul II also frequently emphasized the Church's teaching on the significance of devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

In his encyclical letter, *Mysterium Fidei* (September 3, 1965), Pope Paul VI describes the graces and blessings which await those who manage to find time to visit our divine Lord in the most Blessed Sacrament.

“Christ is truly Emmanuel, that is, 'God with us'. Day and night, He is in our midst; He dwells with us full of grace and truth. He restores morality, nourishes virtue, consoles the afflicted, strengthens the weak. He proposes His own example to those who come to Him that they may learn to be like Himself, meek and humble of heart, and seek not their own interest, but the things of God. Anyone, therefore, who approaches this august sacrament with special devotion and endeavours to return generous love for Christ's infinite love, experiences and fully understands, not without great spiritual joy and profit, how precious is the life hidden with Christ in God, and how great is the value of conversing with Christ, for there is nothing more consoling on earth, nothing more efficacious for advancing along the road to holiness”.

Among the benefits of adoring Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament as stated by Popes and Saints are the following:

- Every Holy Hour we make so pleases the Heart of Jesus that it is recorded in Heaven and retold for all eternity. (*St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta*)
- The spiritual lives of our families are strengthened through our Holy Hour. (*Pope St. John Paul II*)
- A Holy Hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is so important to Jesus that a multitude of souls go to Heaven who otherwise would have gone to hell. (*Jesus revelation to Blessed Dina Belanger*)
- Our Lord hears our prayers anywhere, but He has revealed to His servants that those who visit Him in the Eucharist will obtain a more abundant measure of grace. (*St. Alphonsus Liguori*)
- Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament has His Hands full of graces and He is ready to bestow them on anyone who asks for them. (*St. Peter Alcantara*)
- A Holy Hour in front of the Blessed Sacrament is worth more than a thousand years of human glory. (*St. Padre Pio*)
- A Holy Hour brings Heavens choicest blessings on those who are faithful to their hour (*Pope St. Paul VI*)



By Prof. Michael Ogunu

- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament consoles a soul far beyond what the world can offer. (*St. Alphonsus Liguori*)
- If souls but understood the Treasure they possess in the Divine Eucharistic Adoration the churches would overflow with adorers no less by night than by day (*Blessed Dina Belanger*)
- Jesus Himself is calling you to spend one special hour with Him each week. (*Pope St. John Paul II*)
- A Holy Hour will give you more strength during life and more consolation at the hour of your death and eternity. (*St. Alphonsus Liguori*)
- “I have a burning thirst to be honoured by men in the Blessed Sacrament”. (*Jesus speaking to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*)
- Even a quarter of an hour's prayer in front of the Eucharist perhaps gains more graces than all the other spiritual exercises of the day [outside the Mass]. (*St. Alphonsus Liguori*)
- A Holy Hour helps the one in the world in most need of God's Mercy. (*Pope St. John Paul II*)
- We contribute to the radical transformation of the world during our Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration. (*Pope St. John Paul II*)
- Devotion to the Eucharist is the most noble, because it has God as its object; it is the most profitable for salvation and it gives us the Author of Grace. (*Pope St. Pius X*)

- A Holy Hour before the Most Blessed Sacrament so pleases the Heart of Jesus, that every man, woman, and child on earth receives a new effect of God's graces. (*St. Faustina*)
 - A thousand years of enjoying human glory is not worth even an hour spent sweetly communicating with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. (*St. Padre Pio*)
 - A plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful who visit the Blessed Sacrament, for the purpose of adoration, for at least 30 minutes under the usual conditions! (*Handbook Of Indulgences - Norms & Grants*)
 - I encourage Christians regularly to visit Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament, for we are all called to abide in the presence of God! (*Pope St. John Paul II*)
 - Our Lord is hidden there in the Blessed Sacrament, waiting for us to come and visit Him, and make our requests to Him! (*St. John Vianney*)
 - “You can come to me (in Eucharistic Adoration) at any moment, at any time; I want to speak to you and I desire to grant you grace!” (*Jesus speaking to St. Sister Faustina*)
 - In the course of the day the faithful should not omit to visit the Blessed Sacrament! (*Pope St. Paul VI*)
 - The daily adoration or visit to the Blessed Sacrament is the practice which is the fountainhead of all devotional works! (*Pope St. Pius X*)
 - A Holy Hour of adoration before the Most Blessed Sacrament opens up the floodgates of God's merciful Love upon the world! (*St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta*)
 - Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the best time you will spend on earth! (*St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta*)
 - Eucharistic Adoration will make your soul everlastingly more glorious and beautiful in Heaven! (*St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta*)
- Many Catholics have a desire to visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament but very often they are at a loss as to how to spend their time. A book titled “Prayers for Eucharistic Adoration” compiled and edited by the writer of this article contains prayers which may prove helpful during a visit with Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament.
- As stated by Archbishop Augustine Akubeze (former President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria) in his **Foreword** to the book, “I highly endorse the prayer book and strongly recommend it to all Catholics who wish to visit and adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament” (May 5, 2018).
- May Jesus who is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament bless all those who visit and adore him.

News

Bishop Umoh Inaugurates New Patrons For Provincial CLAN

By Jeremiah Akpabio



The Catholic Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese, Most Rev. Camillus Umoh, penultimate Saturday inaugurated the newly appointed patrons and patronesses for Calabar Ecclesiastical Province of Catholic Lectors Association of Nigeria (CLAN) at Immaculate Conception Parish Ikot Ekpene.

Represented by Chaplain 1 of the Association in Ikot Ekpene Diocese, Rev. Fr. Leo Amah, the Bishop harped on the role of patrons and patronesses in any organization and urged the new patrons to take their roles seriously. He advised the patrons to be a source of growth and development to the association by living a life worthy of emulation. Other priests at the inauguration were the Provincial Chaplain, Very Rev. Fr. Julius Enang, Rev. Fr. Viktor Ekanem, Rev. Fr. Anthony Ndem and Rev. Fr.

Anthony Mbat, the Parish Priest of Immaculate Conception Parish, Ikot Ekpene.

Those inaugurated were: Mr. Godwin Etokakpan and Mrs Alice Ekpe from Ikot Ekpene Diocese, Mr. Bassey Nsor and Hon. Mrs Cecilia Ray-Etta, Ogoja Diocese; Barr Paul Asu and Barr (Mrs) Ekanem Solomon from Calabar Archdiocese as well as Mr. Matthew Anumati and Mrs. Betty Wright of Port Harcourt Diocese

The inauguration of patrons and was part of programme of activities of Provincial CLAN which held her 21st plenary meeting in Ikot Ekpene Diocese last month. In his

welcome address to the Provincial delegates, the host President, Mr. Jeremiah Akpabio described Ikot Ekpene as home of hospitality, full of love, peace and harmony and called on members to commit themselves to the ideals of the Association which is "PROPAGATION OF THE GOODNEWS." He advised them to conduct themselves as true Christians wherever they find themselves by making conscious effort to serve God and humanity and be agents of positive change.

He used the opportunity to roll out plans of CLAN in Ikot Ekpene Diocese for year 2024 to include among others; a seminar/workshop

between March and May to train members on reading techniques which would enable them proclaim the good news as charged by our Lord Jesus Christ in Mk 16:15.

The 21st plenary meeting was presided over by the Provincial President of CLAN Engr. Cajetan A madi who also announced the Central

Working Committee members for 2025 Provincial Retreat to be hosted in Ikot Ekpene Diocese. The Committee is headed by Barr. Akan-Mary Udoh. The Committee was inaugurated by the Provincial Chaplain Very Rev. Fr. Enang to begin work.



AFCON 2023: CAF Clears Osimhen, Simon, Troost-Ekong After Anti-doping Check

Nigeria Super Eagles trio Victor Osimhen, Moses Simon, and William Troost-Ekong came out clean after an anti-doping test was conducted on them at the ongoing AFCON in Côte d'Ivoire.

The Guardian gathered that the test carried out on them did not detect any presence of a prohibited substance.

This means the three players are clear to feature for the Eagles against Angola in the quarter-finals on Friday.

According to CAF, it is mandated that the football body's Doping Control



Officer will conduct the sample collection in their capacity as a CAF Doping

Officer following the COVID-19 new measures.

In principle, two

players from each team will be tested at the end of each match by the

CAF/FIFA Anti-Doping Regulations.

However, the CAF Doping Control Officer is authorized to select additional players for sample collection without giving any reason.

Also, the players to be tested shall be selected via targeted or random methods by the CAF Doping Control Officer.

These players are required to provide urine samples and blood samples, as requested.

Meanwhile, Friday's quarter-final clash between the Super Eagles and Angola will be the first time both teams will meet at the AFCON.

FG Will Take Action On Tanya Okpala's Wellbeing, Sport Minister Assures

The Minister of Sports Development, Senator John Owan Enoh, has promised that the ministry will take action over the disturbing case of former Nigerian Tennis player, Tanya Okpala.

Enoh said this in a statement where he also admitted that the viral video of Okpala is disturbing.

Okpala was seen in a viral video looking unkempt with an injury with a bandage on

her leg while talking to a stranger who offered to buy her a drink.

"I spoke with Tanya's father who briefed me on her current condition and the genesis of her problem was confirmed to me," he said on X.

"I got to know that the Nigerian Tennis Federation paid for Tanya's first rehabilitation many years ago when her condition

became public knowledge but sadly, the former tennis star relapsed after a short while."

Okpala was once a tennis player of repute who played in a lot of tennis tournaments.

She represented Nigeria and the African continent and won laurels to her name.

She was a tennis junior's champion who played at the highest level and was ranked number one at the time.

Enoh thanked the Governor of Anambra State, Charles Soludo, and his team for the swift intervention in the case of Okpala, saying such action is highly commendable.

"As a Ministry, our six-point agenda WAIFAR, has the W for activating and enabling a WELFARE system that caters to serving and retired



athletes," the Sports Minister added.

"As a ministry, we will take action in this regard as

every athlete who has brought glory to our nation deserves appropriate welfare."



Head Coach José Peseiro has warned his Super Eagles to keep level heads and manage the euphoria of their quarter-final qualification, as they countenance a tough last-eight clash with Angola's Palancas Negras on Friday.

The Portuguese gaffer told thenff.com on Monday that he has continued to sing it to the players that the team is yet to win anything, and that full consciousness and concentration must be activated ahead of the evening encounter at the Stade Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

"I am telling them that we are only in the last eight, that we still have some way

to go, and that the farther we go, the tougher the opposition becomes. We have played four matches and won three, so we must keep level heads as we go forward.

"Our philosophy is that there are no small teams here at the Africa Cup. Every team qualified to be here, and every team in the knockout phase qualified from a group phase. Any team in the last eight is good enough for the trophy. We believe we are good enough for the trophy, but we must continue working and putting out our best on match days."

The Negras eliminated Namibia's Brave Warriors

with a 3-0 spanking in the Round of 16, Gelson Dala hitting a brace against the regional rivals at the Stade de la Paix in Bouake.

On-field captain William Ekong told thenff.com that the match against Angola could prove to be the toughest yet for the Eagles, but that he and his teammates are ready for the battle.

"We can no longer expect any easy games. In truth, there have not been easy games here. We have played Equatorial Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, and Cameroon, and none has turned out to be a picnic. From the quarterfinals, it will be a lot

Peseiro Warns Eagles Against Complacency, Ekong Rates Angola Match Toughest

tougher because all the teams will believe they are good enough for the trophy.

"We are discussing among ourselves what we must do. There is no resting on our oars. We saw Guinea eliminate Equatorial Guinea which emerged as the best team in the group phase. Football is like that. We must be alert for the entire period and do our best to convert the chances that we create."

Winger Moses Simon also admitted that it would not be a stroll-in-the-park at the Stade Félix Houphouët-Boigny on Friday.



The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has announced that it will hold the draw ceremony for the African Games football tournaments (Men

"It is going to be a difficult game, like the ones against Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon, and even Equatorial Guinea. We must be at our best and focus on the prize." Clashes between Nigeria and Angola at the international level have been few and far between, but Nigeria has a couple of scores to settle with the southern African nation.

Angola edged Nigeria to reach the last round of the qualification series for the 1990 FIFA World Cup finals in Italy, but the return leg in Nigeria that the

Eagles won 1-0 was under a cloud of tragedy as playmaker Samuel Okwaraji collapsed and died 13 minutes from the end on Several12, 1989. Several other football fans lost their lives in a stampede that ensued after the game. The first leg in Luanda ended 2-2.

Angola also famously stopped Nigeria from reaching the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals, when the Eagles followed a 0-1 loss in Luanda to draw 1-1 with the Negras in a sunny Sani Abacha Stadium in June 2005.

Senegal, South Sudan, Tunisia, and Uganda.

They will be distributed into two groups, with one comprising four teams and the other five, according to the following procedures: Ghana, the host will be in position A1, Nigeria, the runners-up of the previous edition, will be in position B1.

Ghana will host the 13th African Games from March 8 to March 23, 2024.

CAF To Hold African Games Football Tournament Draw February 1

and Women) on February 1 at the Sofitel Hotel in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.

According to CAF, host Ghana and the eight quarterfinalists of the U-20 AFCON, Egypt 2023, are qualified to compete in the football tournament of the 13th African Games, Ghana 2023.

The qualified teams are Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Congo, The Gambia,



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...Peace on earth to men of goodwill

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I PLEAD FOR NIGERIA MY COUNTRY

Government College students, Birnin Yauri in Kebbi State among other group kidnappings. The list goes on. It is no longer frightening to hear of students in secondary schools, students in universities, bus travellers, even train travellers carted away by these evil people. Who kidnap these groups? Why so few rescues? Are the Nigerian Police and the Military no longer competent to nip the challenge of insecurity in the bud? Often the Nigerian Police comes to the media and announce rescue of few persons, perhaps after ransom has been paid. Such announcements may bring relieve to the families of the victims, but is hardly promising and consoling.

Towards the end of the year 2023, Nigerians were gifted with the massacre of not less than 140 villagers in the North Central State of Plateau. The assailants targeted 17 communities in senseless unprovoked attacks for two days without military or police intervention; burning down most houses in the area and destroying farms and properties. The military has been accused of complicity in the carnage. In a viral video, the CAN Chairman of Mangu LGA, in Plateau State, Rev Timothy Daluk, had accused the Nigerian military of supervising the killings of Christians and the destruction of property in the state. Daluk had cried out against the military saying, "I am here to report the situation happening in Mangu Local Government for the whole world to understand. What is happening in Mangu at this particular point in time, the military are the ones sending our people away for the militia to burn their houses. At this particular point in time, they have sent every Christian away from the new market. Thereby leaving the Muslims to come and burn their houses." This is not the first time that the military would be accused of complicity in Plateau massacre. Recall that in 2017 massacre when 29 persons were killed in the Nkiedonwhro community of the State, the President of Rigwe Development Association, Sunday Abdu, had accused soldiers deployed in the area of complicity, saying, "The soldiers masterminded the killing". To what extent these accusations have been denied is yet to be known, at least by the common citizens.

The beginning of the New Year witnessed the upsurge of kidnapping in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. However, the good news is that within one week, the perpetrators of the Abuja kidnappings were napped by the Police. We are yet to hear of the arrest of the perpetrators of other numerous incidents of kidnapping. Of course you can't try that and go scot-free in Abuja. That is where the Who is Who in Nigeria reside, that is the seat of power; that is the home of Nigeria's political class. The 17 communities of Plateau State are populated by peasants and local people that can be dispensed with. Families have lost their loved ones, children have been rendered orphans, our women have been raped and maimed, brutalized and killed, those who survive have been made widows. Our men have lost their children, their properties and their lives; yet we look on helplessly.

While insecurity continues to plague the nation, Nigeria also faces many social and economic challenges. There are high rates of crime, unemployment and poverty. As if that is not enough, the economic situation of the nation continues to challenge the survival of the common citizens. Like insecurity, the bad economic situation persists and continues to grow worse with subsequent governments. Political leaders usually come into power with humongous promises; improvement in security, education, health, economics etc. Rather than experience improvement in condition of living, the ordinary citizen continues to experience hardship, hardship and hardship, spiced with the promise of a better tomorrow.

Eight months after the inauguration of the present regime of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the hardship worsens. Everything is on the high side: transportation, feeding, education, basic amenities, health (drugs are no longer affordable), etc. From the first day of the administration till date, the challenge continues such that eight months after, we are only told to hope that it will be better; to give the government time as it has the magic wand of peace, security and prosperity.

What is most worrisome is that despite all the suffering of the common man, political leadership in the country tends to be insensitive to the plight of the common citizens. This insensitivity is expressed in the very high cost of governance. Nigeria has a critical challenge of the high cost of governance. Despite all the promises of things getting better, despite the much talked about palliatives (which are hardly seen), the humongous cost of

governance of the present administration questions the sincerity and integrity of the government and the political class with regards to the welfare of the Nigerian populace.

Considering these therefore, I plead for my country Nigeria. I plead with the Fulani herdsmen. Do let us survive. Kindly allow us reap what we sowed. Times are gone when nomadic life was seen as normal way of life. Now what is in vogue is ranching. With ranching, we can co-exist. You eat our farm produce, we eat your meat.

I plead with the mercenaries, the foreign killers, if they exist. If you are fighting a religious war as many have conjectured, there is no need. Let us enjoy our freedom of worship. Nigeria belongs to Nigerians. If you were paid to deliver power to politicians, you may have done your part. Go in peace and leave us alone.

I plead with you, the supposed unknown gunmen. One thing I am sure of is that you are not spirit, you are known. You come from a family, you have parents, you come from a community. Yes, you are known! Do allow economic activities flow in the South East. Your demands may be genuine, but your method is like shooting oneself on the foot. The people of the region have to grow economically like the rest of Nigerians. Killing your brothers and sisters because of your agitations does not help in any way to advance your course.

I plead with the bandits and kidnappers, come out of the bush, uncover your face and embrace peace. Engage in meaningful ventures that guarantee yourself development and that of your community. Are you scrambling for mineral resources? Is that worth your blood or the blood of any Nigerian? Must you kidnap, kill and maim? Please in the name of God put a stop to it.

I plead with you members of the security forces do all you can to protect the Nation. Innocent lives have been lost, sometimes due to negligence or complicity. Let it not be said or insinuated that the Nigerian military or the Nigerian police are in capote with agents of insecurity.

Let me plead with you the politicians and the political class. In the first place, those of you serving in one political position or another starting from the presidency to the councillor at the ward level are our servant. The Nigerian citizen is your master and not your stooge. Treat us as you would your master. It is our right, it is your responsibility,

Stop using our children for your ulterior purposes. Stop inciting and dividing us against each other. Let us enjoy the natural endowments of our land. Save our nation for the future generation through your policies and implementations. Stop wasting our resources to feed your insatiable appetite and ego. Do manage our resources well by cutting the cost of governance.

I plead with you Mr. President since you took office it has not been easy with the common citizen. You met a Nigeria ripped by insecurity and economic challenges. We had hoped that with you the poor will breathe. But for the past eight months, the noose is getting tighter against our neck. Today, dollar is N1500, commodities are unaffordable for the common person, the cost of governance is the highest since independence, your Ministers are too many for us to manage. Sometimes we wonder whether politicians are Nigerians and whether they feel what we feel.

I plead with you the common citizen. Know your right, stand up for your right, help to make this nation work by sincere, honest, dedicated and determined effort. Do not push the political class to be dishonest. Do not be a dependent stooge to the political class.

May the Child of a nobody become somebody. May we have enabling environment for development and progress. May Nigerians sleep with their two eyes close. May peace and love reign in our land. May God bless Nigeria my country.



By Fr. Stephen S. Udoh

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