

# ECHOES OF HOPE:

THE STAND OF THE CONFERENCE  
OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF  
NIGERIA ON ISSUES OF FAITH AND LIFE



**Edited by**  
**Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony OSA**

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## **FOREWORD**

The religious life is one of the greatest gifts of God to the Church. It is a response to the call of God to follow Christ more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels and a lifelong gift of oneself to live more and more for Christ and his body the Church (PC 1). It is therefore not surprising that the Church attractively describes the religious life as a consecration to God and a way of perfect charity (LG 44); the Second Vatican Council further describes her as a special calling that belongs to the life and holiness of the Church (LG 44), and through the religious life, the Church presents Christ to believers and unbelievers alike (LG 45).

The Conferences of Major Superiors of Nigeria is a gathering of the Major Superiors of the Religious Orders, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of both male and female groups. And for several years, these Conferences have met annually to prayerfully reflect on the aspects of our life and mission as religious, on the prophetic role of the Church and the contribution of the religious to peace, justice and reconciliation in Nigeria and Africa at large. The Present piece: *ECHOES OF HOPE: THE STAND OF THE CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF NIGERIA ON ISSUES OF FAITH AND LIFE* is a collection of the outcome of the Annual General Assemblies of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria. It is a fundamental document for the history of the Church in Nigeria, and particularly, the religious with emphasis on their intervention on issues of national interest, socio-political and religious importance. The statements of the Conference appear chronologically, according to the date of release and not according to themes

and topics. The reader or researcher would have to search through the volume and go through each of the documents, as the Major Superiors sometimes touched on a number of issues in the same document.

In this present volume, the editor has made the task easy for the reader. He has identified 17 important themes and topics on which the Major Superiors of Nigeria have made statements, taken a position or issued directives. He has put together in one section all that has been said in sixteen years in each of the themes, ranging from formation, aims of the religious life, leadership, collaborative ministry, Sharia law, the Church as the family of God, the Eucharist, self-reliance, reconciliation, justice, peace, the word of God, the implications of the Second Special Synod for Africa, health, new media technology and faith crisis. I recommend this collection not only to Catholics in and outside Nigeria, but also to all those who are interested in profiling what the Conference of Major Superiors have been saying on a variety of issues for the past 20 years.

**Very Rev. Fr. Henry Omonisaye, Cmf  
President CMSN (Men)**

**24<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 Feast of St Anthony Mary Claret**

## Introduction

Over the past fifty years, Major Superiors of different religious congregations in Nigeria have met annually and deliberated and spoken loud, clear and consistently on a number of significant issues of faith and life, with emphasis on issues of national interest, socio-political and religious importance. However, their Assembly of 1998, January is remarkable as they began to release communiqués after their Annual Assemblies. Thus in this edition, there is a collection of communiqués from the year 1998 to 2013. The communiqués compiled in this volume are not only from the Annual Assemblies of the Conference, but also include a communiqué issued after a communication workshop organized by the CBCN for the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria.

This is only a first edition, because the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria has not stopped talking. A future edition will have the opportunity of integrating into the present collection the outcome of the Annual Assemblies of the Conference. This edition is useful to the Major Superiors, to remind them of what they have been saying and how the Conference has developed over the years; it is useful to the Catholic faithful, so that they can keep before their eyes the persistent exhortations of the Major Superiors of Nigeria; it is also useful to researchers who can now have access to the mind of the Major Superiors of Nigeria.

The title of the book, **Echoes of Hope**, has been taken from one of the communiqués of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria. It is our hope that this book will enable

the voice of the Major Superiors of Nigeria to echo more profoundly.

Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony OSA  
**Executive Secretary CMSN (MEN)**

## **FORMATION FOR MISSION**

*Given 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1998, at the Pope John Paull II Pastoral Centre,  
Makurdi, Benue State.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

“Pray that the Lord of the harvest send laborers into the harvest” (Mt. 9:37). Our prayers are being answered. The Lord is sending to us many gifts from heaven, many young men and women, desiring to serve God in Religious Life in Nigeria.

For the past several years, we, the Major Superiors of Nigeria have met annually to prayerfully reflect on aspects of our life and mission. We have focused on our prophetic role in the Church, our mission for justice, peace, and the shape of our life in community. This year our theme is “Formation for Mission”

Over 60 women and men Major Superiors met at the Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, on January 27 - 30, 1998. Two resource persons, experienced in formation gave invaluable inputs; Sr. Maura Ramsbottom, MMM from Ibadan, and Rev. Fr. Francis Okonkwo, CSSp from Akabo, Sr. Deirdre Mckenna, RSm facilitated the sessions and kept us focused.

We shared reactions to the input in small groups. We presented reports. We brought out lives and concerns together at Holy Mass, celebrating the feasts of two



outstanding Religious, St. Angela Merici and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Our busy days in actuality were days of formation for our own mission as Religious Superiors. In a small way we exemplified what we hope for in the formation of our members: prayerful sharing, critical reflection, dedication and careful study of the challenges of formation.

We now share some of the fruits of our labour with our own members, and with the wider church.

## **II. LIGHTS**

There are thousands of generous young men and women daily knocking at the doors of our formation houses seeking for admission. They come searching for God and for meaning in their lives. Their tenacity and sense of purpose is symbolized by a young seedling awaiting nourishment for growth in the presence of the sunshine, or a new chick tentatively coming out of its shell.

The Nigerian culture lends itself to religious fervour and piety which are fundamental to religious vocation. Equally, we are aware of the generous support the Catholic laymen and women give to aspirants to priestly and religious life. Generally, parents eagerly release their children to pursue religious vocations. Others support religious aspirants financially and morally in a way demonstrative of a maturing Church.

It is noteworthy that the Nigerian Church proves its coming of age by sending missionaries outside its own shores at least

during the last ten years. This itself is eloquent of the fact of the abundance of good vocations.

This phenomenon however, is a challenge to us as Major Superiors to provide resources for adequate discernment of vocation and for quality and lasting formation. At the moment we recognize certain existing formative structures, such as the Institute for Formators Du, the Centre for Renewal Jos, and the Jesuit Retreat Centre, Benin City, jus to mention a few. All of these provide solid and excellent resources for the training and continuous formation of our formators.

### **III SHADOWS**

The lights which we have mentioned above, however, are not without their shadows. Some of our time was spent trying to get in touch with the types of people who come to begin formation in our seminaries and houses of formation: their family backgrounds, friends and network of relationships, their educational background, age, hobbies and ways in which they are engaged in and influenced by the world, their images of God and experience of Church, etc. Several images were used to express our impressions. These people may appear sophisticated outwardly but can be quite shallow, ignorant, and confused within. In many cases their theology is hollow, their spiritualities may be strange with little or no grounding in basic Catholic doctrine.

Some regard themselves as finished products oblivious of their own weaknesses, limitations, marked by the experiences of life and culture that surround them, they are often unaware of their need for conversion, grace and the

sacraments. The true meaning of vocation and mission is not clearly understood by them and their families. Head knowledge does not necessarily lead to heart knowledge. We talked about the danger of over-emphasizing psychology, counseling and human development to the negligence of sound theology, spirituality, prayer and spiritual direction in our houses of formation.

In an age characterized by rationalism, classism, racism, sexism and fundamentalism and in our particular culture with its unhelpful traditional practices and customs, such as witchcraft, “hide me I hide you” syndrome, tribalism, growing attraction to culture, secret societies, apparitions, miraculous healings, “419” etc, we wondered how much these factors influence those who come to us. The fact that some priests who have spent many years in the seminaries are prime promoters of some of these phenomena, is a great concern to us.

Another issue of concern is the number of sisters sent on overseas mission without adequate preparation and discernment, sometimes in neglect of our home missions. We wondered if economic reasons have become the primary motivation for missioning rather than apostolic needs. The issue of long prospectus given to new entrants and the whole questions of the priorities for missioning, raised for us the whole issue of witness and justice in our structures of formation.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In considering the whole issue of formation for mission, we want to emphasize the central role, under God, of our

formation personnel, and therefore we see the need to discern wisely in choosing our formation personnel and to have them adequately trained. Since formation is such a delicate task, it is helpful when the directors/ess and his/her assistant(s) work together as a team and when the formation and provincial/central leadership teams collaborate respectfully. Sharing among formators of different Congregations in the same area as well as nationally, can be mutually beneficial.

Since the personal accompaniment of each candidate/novice by the formator is the essential core of the formation process, we recognize that this requires a limited number of candidates/novices per formator. Where Congregations have large numbers of postulants or novices, therefore, they need a correspondingly large number of trained formators.

Given the complexity of our present age and of the work of formation, we call ourselves to re-examine our formation programmes and guidelines to see if we are carrying out in practice what we have stated so beautifully in words, not only for our own sakes but in service of our mission within the whole Church. All our communities should be familiar with our formation programmes so that all can play their appropriate parts in this work which so centrally concerns us all.

We see the need to re-emphasize that the call to the Religious Life is a call to share in a special way in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, a call, therefore, to a life of sacrifice and renunciation. Not all are ready to hear this call. It is necessary, therefore, that all candidates to the religious life be

properly screened by a suitable qualified panel, and psychological assessment be availed of, where possible.

Candidates can only be fully known in their family contexts, so family visitation/contact is important during initial formation. These family contacts can also be used to help educate our families about the true meaning of vocation and discernment.

Within the formation process, some aspects need to be emphasized:

- the importance of personal prayer, and giving time for it within the daily time-table,
- the need to build a foundation of basic Catholic doctrine during the time of postulancy;
- the necessity of helping candidates learn how to reflect on their life's experience;
- our need to discuss openly with candidates some of the shadow side of our times listed above;
- the need to expose aspirants to the values of all Christian vocations;
- the value of well – chosen and supervised pastoral or apostolic experiences.

During the time of initial formation, we feel it would be helpful if candidates of different sexes were given the chance

to get to know one another and build up healthy relationship among them, through inter-novitiate programme organised by the formators.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

In his Apostolic Exhortation, "On Consecrated Life," Pope John Paul II affirms that the Holy Spirit "calls consecrated men and women to present new answers to the problems of our age" (*Vita Consecrata*, 73).

In this year dedicated to the Holy Spirit, our discussions and recommendations are our response to the promoting of the Spirit, as we re-dedicate ourselves to do our best to prepare men and women religious in Nigeria to meet the challenges of mission and ministry in the new millennium.

## **THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AS A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION**

*Given 29th January, 1999, at the Madonna Renewal Centre Nkpor-Agu, Onitsha, Anambra State*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria currently holding at the Madonna Renewal Centre, Nkpor, Onitsha, has a special Mission: To refocus the aims of our Regions Life.

Two papers were presented by Sr. Chigozie Obasi DDL and Fr. Anthony Akinwale, OP to help our reflection. Titled: *Religious Life: A Sign of Contradiction* and *Sign of the Cross: A Challenge to Self/World*. These papers galvanized us to serious reflection which gave rise to shared/vocalized concerns; they woke us up to the awareness of the challenges that we must face, and actions we must take up to effect a meaningful refocusing of our goals in Religious Life, vis-à-vis the message of the two papers.

Self-gratification, without much labour, and at all costs, easily found or worshipped by our society and the modern age. This is the environment in which we, the Religious, have been called to operate. We are soaked in it, our major concern is that the Religious is getting sucked into it (osmotically).

The two papers raised our awareness to the sad fact of the life-situation in Nigeria (and other countries globally) – power – mania, greed, intimidation, manipulation, extortion, brutality and even murder – simply to get rich, popular,

acquire positions and titles. Leaders and powers-that-be have lost the sense of human dignity, respect, sympathy, etc. They manufacture and impose hardship and poverty on the citizenry.

Our Religious Life is fashioned to run against these vicious tenets which plague our societies. It is meant to help sanitize the situation. This life is geared towards being a Sign of Contradiction - after the example of Christ - willing to answer the call to be available to all and sundry - to be ready, season and out of season, to give ourselves - to open up and reach out to the needy (materially, mentally and morally/spiritually) - to embrace the whole mystery of Christ's Cross and the Good News. The essence of our Religious Life is wedged on the folly of the Cross of Christ.

## **THE SERIOUS CONCERNS WHICH EMERGED FROM OUR REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS ARE:**

### **1. The Issue of Identify:**

- our work should not define who we are
- the need to clarify and understand again and again the meaning and purpose of the Religious Life.

### **2. Formation:**

- the pageantry and expensive gifts displayed at ordinations and professions.
- the mad quest for education by our members.
- the finally professed members of our Congregations who no longer find meaning in their lives, who drift along and refuse to leave.

### **3. Our Life Style:**



- too much travelling to attend ceremonies such as ordinations, professions, weddings and burials,
  - people coming to us for money,
  - individual religious who go begging for their basic needs outside their communities,
  - the culture of silence in the face of injustices.
4. **Leadership:**
- the uncaring attitude of some of our Leaders in our communities
  - the misuse of authority and the abuse of power
  - the inadequate preparation of our local superiors for their roles
  - lobbying that sometimes goes on during election into office.
5. **Random Founding of Religious Congregations:**
- the proliferation of these groups and the motivation of their founders
  - the fact that most of them are founded by men for women
  - the absence of proper formation within these institutes and sometimes the abuse of womanhood
  - the lack of pastoral care for those whose institutes have been suppressed.

### **CHALLENGES:**

The two papers we heard and reflected on, which gave rise to the concerns enumerated above, also challenged us seriously as religious and as religious leaders. Some of the challenges we would like to hold onto so that they motivate us all in the coming year:

To be a Sign of Contradiction is to be a Sign of the Cross. We accept that the only way we can be a Sign of the Cross is to be people who contemplate the cross daily. We need to realize, and help our young religious to grow in the realization that our life is centred on the self-given Christ in the paschal mystery. Young religious also need to be helped grow in a progressive understanding of the meaning of the vows. We recognize that today's candidates are coming from day's society, and so they need special (re) formation as regards values. In this regard, every institute/order needs to have sufficient well-formed and committed formators who have themselves internalized the values of the gospel. Each of us individually and all of us as Institutes/Orders need to return constantly to our original motivation if we are to be who we are called to be.

In order to be a Sign of Contradiction in the society, we see the need to challenge certain customs by acting in a counter - cultural way when customs are not in the line with gospel values, e.g.

- treatment of outcasts
- culture of silence in the face of injustice
- pursuit of academic titles
- compulsion to attend every funeral.

Other customs should be challenged by us:

- treatment of widows
- circumcision of young women
- general oppression of women.

In line with this, we see the need for broad education in Justice and Peace.

We, as Congregation leaders, felt challenged in a special way to review our leadership style in the light of the Cross. In this light, we challenged ourselves to:

- realize that leadership requires embracing, not denying our own weakness;
- remember that we are leaders of people, not structures or projects;
- remember that we, as leaders, should empower, encourage and enhance the gifts and talents of our members;
- remember that we, as leaders, must listen to the small voices, not just the vocal ones who can manipulate the process.

### **CALL TO ACTION:**

From our discussions and responses to the two papers, the Conference proposed come areas for action for 1999, to be assessed at the Joint Meeting in January, 2000.

#### **1. Leadership**

- a. There will be a two-day workshop on Religious Leadership at the January, 2000 meeting.
- b. We have listened to ourselves and our own experiences of leadership; we need to listen to the experiences of others too, in particular the communities at the local level. Local communities need to reflect together on the question of leadership, and on the meaning of the vow of obedience within the context of the Cross.

#### **2. Networking**

We wish to learn from one another about specialized apostolates to the marginalized and needy. We suggest the “Newsletter” of the Department for Religious as a suitable Forum for sharing information and ideas.

3. **Poverty**

This is an area of much misunderstanding and even conflict. We propose that a local level, leaders and communities reflect together on the vow of poverty in the context of the Gospel, with particular reference to –

- (a) Actual and practical difficulties that people experience with poverty;
- (b) The demands made by family and cultural experiences;
- (c) What compels some individuals to go begging for their needs outside their community, and whose responsibility this is.

**CONCLUSION:**

“Every religious is called to witness to the saving power of Christ’s powerlessness on the Cross. The religious is called to the memory of the Church in this regard. Placed in the midst of the Church and in the midst of the world, the religious is to constantly remind the Church and the world by the very fact of his or her presence that there is saving power in the powerlessness of Christ on the Cross.

## **LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE**

*Given 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2000, at the Pastoral Institute, Ibadan, Oyo  
State*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In accordance with the decision reached at the Joint Meeting of January 1999, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria this year focused its attention on the topic of Leadership in Religious Life.

The keynote paper was presented by Fr. Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu, C.S.Sp. LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE – CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE. Later during the joint meeting there was a paper on Conflict Management Resolution by Fr. Oyesola Dokun, O. P.

Fr. Uzukwu's paper outlined the broad categories of Authority and Leadership within African pattern of social organization: societies with dispersal of authority, and societies with central authority. "Authority in many hands", the more common pattern, involve structures of consultation and empowerment at many levels: the authority of the leader is both enhanced and limited, while the whole community is involved in a process of consultation and decision-making. In African Society there are also many examples of centralised Authority, which can range from autocratic to collegial, focusing power in one or a few hands, and emphasising acceptance and obedience among the community. Each way has its strengths and weaknesses.

From this initial analysis, Fr. Uzukwu went on to taints and qualities that produced a greater and wider involvement of the general community in the process of leadership: consultation and deliberation at many levels, leading to consensus (African “Palaver”); respect for authority; coherence between authority and notions of the sacred; the art of listening and dialogue (“large ears”); leadership as a service of authority.

All these and other insights, helped us in our discussions on leadership in Religious Life. We now wish to share with you some of the fruits of our discussions. Our concerns were grouped under five major headings:

1. How our culture influences our was of leadership (“Palaver Culture”)
2. Different ways of leadership in church hierarchy and in religious life.
3. Post – Modern influence (Our present context)
4. The Power of the Gospel in leadership
5. Day – to –Day issues and challenges in our communities.

## **PALAVAR CULTURE**

African Palaver culture indicates the need to hear the viewpoints of all taking a decision that concerns all. The practice would discourage arbitrariness and autocracy in the exercise of authority. In practice, distance and lack of communication medium leaves the classic concept of palaver only an ideal to be aimed at. The leader, however, must at crude moments take decisions meant to serve the interest of the majority. While listening is important, it is not an end in

itself; it should lead to calculated actions that evoke responsibility and team – work on the part of the community.

## **HIERARCHICAL AND PARTICIPATIVE WAYS OF LEADERSHIP**

We need to acknowledge that there are different structures, language and practice of leadership found in the hierarchical Church and in Religious life. We can vary in a preference for dialogue or plain obedience. It is the example of the Leader's styles of leadership that have the greatest effect, and it is during the time of formation the most people learn what leadership and authority mean. We are also affected by our cultural background and by the changes taking place in the world around us.

## **POST - MODERN INFLUENCES:**

Our post-modern world confronts the Religious with challenges at different levels. Respect for the individual can lead to individualism, while the guarantee of human Right can be exploited for self-protection. One can own one's future, and construct a community based on the internet but devoid of neighborliness. The challenges of the Paschal Mystery – life through death – remains the gospel challenge for individuals in search for self-fulfillment. Concern for ecological balance of the world is a sign of care for others.

## **THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL IN LEADERSHIP**

Our authority and leadership should be modeled after that of Christ our Master, who came not to be served but to serve, we are to transform all cultures for a better service of God's children and enhancement of their life. For everyone, our primary concern should be to do the will of God.

## **DAY - TO - DAY ISSUES**

- We need to evaluate the values we hold and operate on as religious.
- We need to pay greater attention to the discernment of vocations, and improve formation skills.
- We need to learn and adopt better leadership skills.

## **CHALLENGES:**

In our discussions and sharing we met with many challenges to the better exercise of leadership in religious life. The following are some of the more significant ones.

- We are challenged to lead by example - “people would rather see a homily than hear one”.
- We are challenged to learn the art of listening, and of understanding persons as individuals - “large ears, and African Palaver”.
- We are challenged to witness to the gospel values and to search for what is good in new things.
- We are challenged to build co-responsibility as an aspect of both authority and obedience.
- We are challenged to cope with different perceptions of leadership within our own communities, and within the wider Church.
- We are challenged to compassion both for those who are in authority and those who are not.

We invite you to walk with us in facing these challenges of Leadership and Authority in Religious Life - we must be followers before we can be leaders.



## **COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY**

*Given 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2001, Sacred Heart Pastoral Centre, Jos,  
Plateau State*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria held its annual meeting the 15<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> January 2001 at the Sacred Heart Pastoral Centre Jos. It focused on Collaborative Ministry, which was animated by three expert papers centered on the participation of religious congregations in the life of the local church. Its model was a global vision of interiority, differentiation and communion - reflected in the community of life on the planet Earth. Its motivation was the enlivening of team spirit and the renewal of pastoral practice dictated by the givenness of change and an evolving process of creation. The Conference resolved on a deeper collaboration with the local church, local clergy and laity.

The church is the Body of Christ and the People of God is greatly enriched by the presence of the men and women religious. The leader of the local church need to recognize more, appreciate more, affirm and utilise more than charisma of the congregations and individuals capacities of their members in the common work of building up the Body of Christ.

The religious witness to the holiness of the church. Through their vows and community life they radically embrace the values of the Gospel and thereby make creditable the presence of God's Kingdom among their communities.

To enhance collaborative ministry in the pastoral ministry of the local church the conference has mapped out the following strategies:

- (i) The religious congregations and their competent members should be more involved in the pastoral planning of the dioceses, since by the very nature of the church, they are not strangers or aliens in the local church.
- (ii) The laity, as an essential part of the people of God, are to be seen as co-workers in the Lord's vineyard and therefore are to be given adequate training and allowed to fulfill their potential in the ministries appropriate to their competences.
- (iii) The religious as a radical witness to God's love, must continue their selfless ministry to new and actual problems of society like women-trafficking, HIV/AIDS patients, the marginalized, the jobless, the increasing number of the unmarried, the poor earth.
- (iv) Prejudices against the religious would be reduced among diocesan clergy and hierarchy if a course on religious life is introduced into all major seminaries and taught by the religious. Religious should be helped to appreciate the nature of the priesthood.
- (v) Religious should resist the attractions of worldliness incongruent with their vows, e.g., through a simple life-style including the way we celebrate professions and ordinations.

- (vi) Therefore, for the religious to be identified with their call, great care must be taken in the recruitment and formation of their candidates. Formators need to be carefully chosen and well prepared for inculcating a life of service to others.
- (vii) Present-day experience shows that arbitrariness and dictatorial attitudes in some church pastors and Religious Superiors are negative signals for God's Kingdom, but dialogue and consultation in the decision -making process promote collegial and collaborative partnership in the building up of the Kingdom. Again, respect for the individuals, respect for the environment, respect for the congregational identities on the one hand, and the thoroughgoing commitment to the demands of the Kingdom of God on the other hand, will together renew the face of the local church.

It is the wish to the Joint Conference that these suggestions be given the seriousness they deserve.

## **SHARIA: PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS**

*Given 19<sup>th</sup> January 2002, at Assumpta Pastoral Centre, Owerri,  
Imo State*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our nation lurches from one crisis to another with the attendant fears, violence and bloodshed. We continue to pray for “Nigeria in distress” even as we strive to understand the many evils that confront our country. The adoption of Sharia, the Islamic law code, in some states of our country threatens the very foundation of our nationhood. Given that all people have certain prejudices against another religious culture we must not allow these prejudices to becloud our judgment. We want to explore the pastoral implications of imposing a religious legal code on a pluralistic society such as ours and the discriminatory attitude that such legal code engenders politically, socially, and religiously. Our Christian commitment to citizenship and social justice in a united Nigeria urges us to understand what the issues are in the present debate over the Sharia, educate our Christian community on its implication in the federated state of Nigeria so as to adopt a proactive response.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

Most Christians from the South do not possess enough information about the Sharia legal System. For this reason a certain amount of indifference is exhibited which leads to insufficient solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Sharia States. Also our legal system is unable to offer prompt and

efficient justice that is being sought for by the ordinary people. Thus our Muslim brothers and sisters take advantage of this limitation to offer an alternative way, which they consider better. From a pure financial interest, we see a young Christian woman taking an offer of marriage from a Muslim man. Similarly, a young Christian job seeker quickly gives up his faith in exchange for a promising job, a Politician forsaking his Christian ethics in order to win votes, and Christian families support these moves because of financial interest accruing them.

Besides, Sharia has negative influences on citizenship in the country and impinges on human rights, for example people who lose a hand or a leg or any part of the body or are stoned to death suffer injustice from the point of view of the International law, the case of Madam Safiyat is still fresh in minds. Sharia limits movement and creates fear, worries and tension in the minds of the people, suspicion and a sense of insecurity. It also encourages segregation, discrimination and disunity. Nigeria has an international obligation to safeguard its citizens from cruel and unusual punishments in accordance with the United Nations' law which we have signed.

However, Sharia has challenged Christians to work in cooperation with one another, it enables us to re-examine our value system and the needs of the society. Also it makes us a little more aware of our responsibilities to one another in the family, community and the nation as a whole, as well as challenge good and honest Christians to move into politics in order to sanitize it.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our Catholic Church in Nigeria should become more creative in its attitude towards meeting the various challenges from the state, political parties and other religions. We have to wake up from our slumber and begin to catch up with lost time. In this regard, the following are proposed:

1. Improvement in the communication system in the Church. A lot of ignorance about many things including Sharia issue exists in the Church. It will be good if electronic networking can be looked into by the Communication Department of the Catholic Secretariat to ensure quick and efficient exchange of information between the dioceses and Congregational headquarters.
2. More proactive actions are encouraged. Example of more of the actions we would like to see are positive use of silent protest marches against any evil of our day, educating Christians about Sharia, encouraging Christian politicians to adhere firmly to Christian principles. In this wise, the strengthening of Peace and Justice Department in each diocese is called for. The department is to be equipped to organize protest marches, which will involve all of us able-bodied people of each diocese. Other areas where the Peace and Justice department can initiate actions include such evils as Bribery and Corruption, Children and Women abuse, Women and Children trafficking, Instant Jungle justice against thieves, use of Double Standards, Delayed justice and Excessive materialism. Also more use is to be made of prayer,

fasting and creation of awareness with regard to the issue of the day

3. Each diocesan headquarter is challenged to initiate a programme of action, which will enable youth, and members of the NYSC to deepen their faith and imbibe culture, and to discourage tribal groupings and their attendant evils.
4. Each parish or each diocese is encouraged to create job opportunities thereby minimizing poverty and allowing for creative usefulness on the part of the youth.

Finally, all of us Church leaders need to undergo an examination of conscience leading to a conversion from certain erosion of values. We need to be challenged anew by the ever-living word of Christ to be 'salt of the earth and light of the world". It is only then that the mission we proclaim will be meaningful and effective leading to the creation of a new, peaceful and just society we all yearn for.

## **SEXUALITY AND CELIBACY**

*Given 18<sup>th</sup> January 2003, at Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Ado  
– Ekiti, Ekiti State*

We, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, at a meeting held at Ado – Ekiti, from January 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003, working together in a Spirit of unity, collaboration and interdependence, for greater effectiveness in mission and ministry in the Church and in our world today focused on the following burning issues.

### **1. Crisis in issues of Sexuality and Celibacy**

Prompted by the numerous reports of sexual abuse and abuse of power among some priests and religious we had a two – day workshop on **Sexuality and Celibacy in the Nigerian Church** we examined this topic critically under its psycho-social and theological dimensions as vowed religious. We recognize that human sexuality and celibacy are both gifts from God. But as products of our society plagued by moral decadence we have been adversely affected in this area. However as a prophetic group in the church we reaffirm our mission to uphold these God-giving gifts of our sexuality and celibacy.

The joint Conference decided on the following lines of action:

- a.* A wholistic formation, which will include human development with emphasis on sexuality and celibacy. This wholistic formation is to be carried out during initial and ongoing formation both for priests and religious.



- b. Adequate and continuing formation of formators (including Rectors, Lecturers and Spiritual Directors) in the area of integral human development.
- c. Workshops will as a result be conducted in the three regions of Nigeria on the topic of Sexuality and Celibacy in the Nigerian Church. All are encouraged to avail themselves of this opportunity.

## **2. Women/Child Trafficking**

We acknowledge with deep appreciation the contributions by the Bishops' Conference of Nigeria and other conferences within and outside the Catholic Church for their efforts at combating this evil. Over 20 women have been rehabilitated since the inception of the project. We call for more collaboration in this project from all and sundry.

## **3. Collaborative Ministry**

We recognize the awareness that has been created in the involvement of women in Church activities. For instance, in the just concluded Pastoral Congress in Ibadan, the input of women was made more visible than before. We request that this collaboration be continued and improved upon, and that more women be included in the area of decision - making in the church.

## **4. The new Immigration Regulation for our ex-patriate missionaries**

We are grateful to the Bishop's Conference of Nigeria for promptly intervening in the recent Immigration problem. We say more grease to their elbows. It would be

wonderful if the Nigerian Government will give expatriate missionaries an encouraging immigration status.

In conclusion, we attest that our prophetic role as religious require us to take a critical stand in the face of these ills that plague us in the Church and the society. All are invited, as members of one "Body of Christ" (1 Cor. 6:15: 1 Cor. 12:12 - 31) to bear united witness to the love of Christ who offers us His body and blood in the Eucharist we celebrate.

## **FORMATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH AS FAMILY OF GOD**

*Given 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2004, at the Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna,  
Kaduna State*

### **PREAMBLE**

We the members of the Conference of Major Religious of Nigeria, at the end of our 37<sup>th</sup> annual meeting held at the Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna from 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2004 with the theme: *“Formation Within the Context of the Church as Family of God”* hold and declare:

That in response to the African Synod of sBishops, 1996, reiterated at the National Pastoral Congress of Nigeria, which affirmed “the Church as Family” as a model for the African Church, this assembly wishes to explore more deeply the giftedness of the family.

As Africans we hardly define ourselves apart from family. The family occupies a pre-eminent position in how we conceive life and how we envisage and experience our position in the universe. Church as the family of God does not mimic family; it creates a new kind of family. It draws on our indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, local resources and understanding of family life, but it also challenges, enriches and transform them.

Family in the African understanding is the foundation of life in community and society. Against this background, the

church as the family of God can only mean one thing: as ecclesial principle of reconstruction and rescue of the family. Conscious promotion of diversity is the hallmark of the church as family. Formation in the context of the church as family is diametrically opposed to the divisive tendencies of tribe and clan. Hence, the idea of the church as family suggests an inclusiveness which accommodates a diversity of orientations.

The Trinitarian nature of the God-head invites every human person to a life of communion within a larger human family in general. A fuller expression of this is experienced within the model and framework of the Church as the family of God. We recognize the uniqueness, giftedness and inner beauty that every individual brings into this family.

We recognize that vocations are special gifts from God to His family, the Church. To accept these gifts with gratitude from God is to welcome, nurture, accommodate, patiently accompany the candidate on a journey of self-discovery. We need to enhance a greater openness to the Spirit, awareness of the contemporary society, acquisition of basic navigational tools to function and live within the prevalent society with a view of helping it conform to the will of the Author of creation. We strongly hold and believe that the task of genuine, Gospel-based formation in the context of the Church as the family of God cannot be overemphasized. God is the origin of vocation, he makes vocation work. We hold that the Father, calls, the Son is the Way and the Spirit moulds and nourishes vocations.

A family without a woman is like a hut without supporting posts. The wider society is not kind to women. Some structures of the church have been unkind to women. In the Church as family, our religious institutes ought to take the side of the Gospel and resist the temptation to further traumatize our already brutalized and subdued women.

## **STATEMENTS**

- The fact that the Church has helped to academically train innumerable number of people in several areas of human endeavour should serve as a witness and challenge to all authorities, both spiritual and temporal, to invest in a holistic training and development of the human person, thus helping the individual realize her/his potentials.
- We appeal to families to create conducive environments for proper upbringing in genuine love. This will in turn enable the children accept their uniqueness and offer their gifts to the family and society at large.
- Religious congregations are to improve on the quality of their training programmes and to face up to prevalent and modern challenges.
- We call on the government to make education readily available and affordable. Our schools should be places where the full potential of the human person are easily realized.

- We challenge our educational institutions to eliminate the presence of cultism and other anti-social behaviours among our young people.
- We condemn modern trends militating against genuine growth in human families such as gay marriages, lack of due commitment and action against HIV - AIDS, marital breakdowns, women and child trafficking, prostitution etc.
- The family is at the heart of God and also at the heart of society. We call on segments of society to work towards a fuller realization of the human race as the people of God.
- Our formation should acknowledge and encourage indigenous models of holiness and commitment to God in the religious life. It is the task of formation in the Church as family to empower women and men to begin to construct and tell their own stories - stories of their models, heroines and saints.
- We commit ourselves to pray for our society.

## **THE EUCHARIST AS THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF OUR LIFE**

*Given 15<sup>th</sup> January 2005, at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat  
and Conference Centre, Enugu, Enugu State*

With profound gratitude to the ever present God who gives Himself to us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, we the members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, upon prayerful reflection at the conclusion of our thirty eighth annual meeting and in keeping with the Holy Father's declaration of October 2004 – September 2005 as the year of the Holy Eucharist State that:

- a. The Holy Eucharist is the greatest gift of God to humankind – it is truly God's gift of Himself to the Church. By this act, Jesus fulfills his promise to be with us until the end of time. Indeed, He will not leave us as orphans.
- b. With the realization that the Eucharist defines and gives the Consecrated life its character and essential meaning, we wholeheartedly embrace the challenge to offer ourselves in charity as God in Jesus Christ generously gave himself to us. Further, we affirm that as in the Exodus days of old, Christ in the Eucharist has become our manna in the desert of our life's journey. Thus he strengthens and urges us on to the full attainment of the Kingdom.
- c. We are therefore, challenged to be a Eucharistic people whose main preoccupation is to become perfect in charity. After being so equipped, our

charity is to communicate itself as a life - giving spiritual energy to other souls throughout the whole world.

- d. Consequently, it implies that living in a world and time such as ours that is characterized by suffering, sin and death, we should be prepared to participate in Christ's struggle to liberate our society by fighting against the forces of evil that are destroying our individual lives and nation by bribery and corruption, ethnocentrism, political deceit, rabid greed for money and the craze for power and domination.
- e. In spite of the growing cult of devotion and love of the Eucharist by huge numbers of the faithful, we equally recognize with sadness the loss of reverence among some of our people for the Holy Eucharist due partly to the general erosion of real values in the world. Also regrettable is the lack of proper and orthodox Catholic teaching. We therefore encourage the restoration of the practice of routine and sound catechesis in our parishes by the Clergy and religious. However, we soberly realize that there is no substitute for a life of *WITNESS* as the best teacher of all.
- f. We believe that there is a definite need for Catholics to match the modern and unwholesome trends that are detrimental to our cherished Eucharistic devotions with a zealous commitment to become apostles of the Holy Eucharist. Further, we call on every Catholic to ensure that those who treat the Eucharist with levity receive timely correction.



We take this precious moment to condemn selfishness and marginalization of the poor in our midst, the lack of genuine effort by some authorities to provide an environment for each person to participate fully in the God – given opportunities of life, and all power – wielding tendencies of the rich.

We earnestly appeal that relevant Church documents on the Eucharist be properly utilized for the purpose of providing full and orthodox catechesis. We urge every Catholic to embrace the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist in silent prayer and as part of the Catholic Community. For greater fruitfulness in our Eucharistic encounter, we also fraternally urge everyone to spend time on reflection before and after Mass. Finally, we believe that a good homily occasioned by deep faith and sound reflection on the Word is but a basic necessity for the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist.

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## **RELIGIOUS AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA**

*Given 21<sup>ST</sup> January, 2006, Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State*

1. We, the Major Superiors of Institutes of Religious and Apostolic life of both men and women, at the 39<sup>th</sup> Joint National Assembly held at the Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Ado Ekiti, took up the theme of ***“Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity: Religious as Agents of Transformation in Nigeria”***. This theme which was previously lunched on a global plane in Rome November 2004, was the focus of the Conference to explore the forms of its concrete application in the context of the Nigerian society.
2. Aware that the vocation to consecrated Life draws us firstly to follow Christ more closely, radically and ‘passionately’ through commitment to the vows and life of evangelical counsels, we have also come to realize that this deep communion with Christ impels us to produce fruits, in the form of good works that will transform the society and the world in which we live, in keeping with the specific charisms of our respective institutes.
3. Our charisms in the Church are a shining example of ecclesiology of Communion. Establishing a spirituality of communion relevant to our mission in the Church today can only be based on the Trinitarian Communion which

we express in our Liturgical celebrations and personal prayer.

4. To be true agents of transformation in our society today, it is vital that we, Consecrated persons should be mindful that:
  - At the core of authentic religious commitment and witnessing are encounter, surrender, self-sacrifice and discipline.
  - The Profession of vow is not an end in itself but a passionate means that “fires” us to life of selfless and dynamic service of God and humanity.
  - The primacy of God in the lives of the religious is paramount as the energy and the passion we need to live out our prophetic role as agents of transformation in the society all flow from a life of contemplation, prayer and deep intimacy with Christ.
  - Collaboration between Congregations, Conferences (male and female) is an invaluable witness to our unity in the following of Christ in whom “there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female”. (Gal 3:28).
5. Religious consecration is by its very nature transformative because it is a call to follow Christ passionately in a radical way: by continuing to show the face of Christ to the sufferings of millions of persons in the world, afflicted and harassed in so many ways.
6. We are confronted with the gravity of the present moment in Nigeria - social and economic stress, structural

injustice, disregard for human rights, chaos, political disorder and the different faces of woundedness among our people.

7. We are impelled to constantly reach out to those living with HIV/AIDS, the unemployed, the victims of child abuse and trafficking in persons, the oppressed and widows. We commit our resources and personnel towards their upliftment. We will always stand by them in their difficulties, sharing the love of Christ with them. The ideal of the two-fold passion for Christ and humanity impels us to stand against all forms of social injustices and discrimination in our communities, and in the wider society of Nigeria.
8. As agents of transformation in Nigeria, we are salt for the earth and light for the world (cf Mt 5:13 – 14). This should be seen in our life style and commitment to our mission. To show the face of Christ in our pastoral work, we need to rediscover the contemplative dimension of Christ's life because contemplating the face of Christ is the place where we start solving today's pastoral problems.
9. We affirm that we can restructure our communities by
  - Reclaiming the charisms of our founders/foundresses
  - Reformulating our Formation Programmes in the light of present day challenges and opportunities.
  - Promoting the recruitment of good candidates for our Congregations/Orders
  - Training formators capable of leading by example.

10. Consecrated Life is a gift of the Holy Spirit for building up the Church and the society (1 Cor. 12). To avoid proliferation of institutes, there should be a clear discernment of the Spirit. The norms and directives of the Church in this regard should be carefully followed.

## **THE RELIGIOUS AND THE EXERCISE OF POWER**

*Given 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2007, at the Daughters of Divine Love  
Retreat and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja FCT*

This year, 2007, is the 43rd anniversary of the foundation of the Joint Conference of Major Superiors of Institutes of Religious and Apostolic life in Nigeria. The Conference held its Annual Meeting at DRACC, Lugbe, Abuja FCT. The theme of this year's 40<sup>th</sup> conference was ***"Power and its Exercise in our Culture and in Religious Life"***.

In the forty three years of our existence as a religious conference, we have experienced in the Nigerian culture and the Church a variety of leadership styles. Aware that leadership is a gift for the good of the community, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria believes that authority in the Church is for the accomplishment of the mission of Christ in the world. We should use leadership to stimulate fidelity to the charism of our founders among the members of the institutions that we are called to serve. As leaders we should be sensitive in providing the kind of formation that will inspire commitment to mission and to promote a sense of well-being among the members, encouraging their unity while respecting the diversity of the individuals so as to inspire creativity and vitality in the apostolates entrusted to us by Christ.

Since this religious leadership and authority is temporary, we should stimulate enthusiasm and model a total gift of

self in our missions and our ministries following the example of the Master who emptied himself and taking the form of a servant became obedient unto death even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-7).

In order to promote good working relationship with our members, we should endeavor to stay close to them, love, listen, and dialogue with them in faith and discernment so as to seek the will of God for the mission.

To avoid burn-out and disillusionment in our role, we should whole-heartedly provide for team building within our councils, invest generously for on-going human and spiritual formation of members and encourage subsidiary and effective sharing of responsibility among all the members.

Through collaboration and good communication we should provide guidance and supervision that will encourage accountability and transparency that is necessary for the missions of our institutes. We should use consultation as a wise guide and a process for decision making. Through chapters, assemblies and visitation of our local communities, religious leaders should engage in apostolic and pastoral reflection and use this as a means of evaluating, recommending and animating our members.

For the sake of our mental, physical and spiritual health, we give quality time to networking, recreating and seeking support from our colleagues in leadership. At the same time we can help each other carry the cross that is an

integral part of our role, allowing ourselves to be inspired and led one day at a time through our intimacy with God.

We recommend the use of arbitration when necessary to handle sensitive issues and conflicts between members at congregational/inter-congregational levels and reconciliation that will enable a better working relationship.

As we enter into an election year, we shall do our best to conscientize members of our congregations and the public to take up their civic responsibilities to register and vote for leaders who will be inspiring, visionary, organized and listening and who are more concerned about the welfare of the whole nation rather than themselves.

We acknowledge that some of our leaders have been good while others have led our nation into decadence and disrepair. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of leadership in our nation is that as a nation we have sat back and allowed our leaders to take us to ruin. Edmund Burke, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish political philosopher said "All that is necessary for evil to succeed is for good men (and women) to do nothing"

Our nation is not lacking of good men and women. This is a time for vision, judgment and action on the part of everyone, including our secular and religious leaders. All bishops, clergy and religious are empowered by God to keep the flame of hope and unity alive!



We must together work passionately and persistently for the realization of a dream: a safer nation, a better economic and political system, a land where the systemic evil cycle of blinding poverty will be broken, a land with a rule of law, and a nation where human life and dignity are respected and protected.

**Very Revd. Fr. Emmanuel Ede, CMF**  
**Mother Ifechukwu Udorah, DDL**  
**President, CMSN (Men)**  
**President, NCWR**

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## **CHALLENGES OF SELF-RELIANCE FOR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA**

*Given 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2008, at Assumpta Pastoral Centre, Owerri,  
Imo State*

### **INTRODUCTION**

We, the members of the Conference of the Major Superiors of Nigeria, (CMSN), thank God for His love and Providence that brought us together and sustained us during the one week of a prayerful reflection and deliberations on a theme of great importance, namely: *Challenges of Self – Reliance for Religious Institutes in the Church in Nigeria.*

### **A conviction and Serious Urgent Concern**

The problem of self-reliance, in fact, has been a matter of serious and urgent concern for the Church in Africa for several decades, since Vatican Council II. In Nigeria, the CMSN consider it an imperative issue that can no longer be postponed nor could she shy away from for too long. We are convinced that it is for the good and development of the Religious Life and the Church and our nation, indeed for Africa, and for the dignity of our African people that we – clergy, religious and laity – should tackle the problem head on and in all its dimensions.

To stimulate more reflections, two main papers were presented, and we had group workshops and debates. It is clear that poverty is an agonizing reality. We appreciate that we must go back to the effective care and use of the earth, its

re-productivity, and the inter-related nature of the plants, animals and human persons. We see the need for a holistic vision and practice of self-reliance that includes the social, moral, spiritual and economic aspects of life.

We recognize that poverty is a dynamic process. The principal element in the poverty elimination program is the evangelical capacity building and the creation of enabling environments that tend to put the poor persons and poor community in the condition of control of their own situation. We are therefore called to a profound social responsibility. The essence of this social responsibility is solidarity, which is a manifestation of a viable level of human culture where people see as normal and imperative the use of one's resources in such a way that nobody is left behind. In this regard, we see the value of an "economy of communion", which reaffirms and reactivates the position of solidarity in social constructions and ensure the sustainability of this human value. Economy of communion is a commitment to an active and generative use of resources, without limiting the actions on just giving (resources, money, materials, etc) but gets them to circulate within the social fabric of communities to make them reproduce themselves. In fact, the way to fight poverty effectively is by making the poor productive.

The religious institutes and indeed the local churches must strive towards self-reliance at the intellectual, cultural, financial and materials levels.

First of all, we must identify the causes of dependency of African Religious Institutes; the roots of these causes can be

traced, among others, to the history of colonization, bad leadership often fraught with corruption, and acculturation resulting from colonization. We admit that the dependency of religious institutes arise from such factors as: missionary activities in the country' poor founding background; lack of creativity; poor accountability; poor economic planning and non-aggressive investments.

### **Some Challenges**

We recognize some challenges facing us.

- The challenge is to render the poor communities and persons ingenious, inventive and creative. We are to apply the same concept (capacity building and creation of enabling environments) to our religious communities.
- Make the poor person and community an efficient producer;
- Promote agriculture. The concept of sustainable development implies that we can increase our productivity while protecting and enhancing our environment. Such responsibility will require a radically new and different ways of thinking and organizing our agricultural and other social and economic activities.

Thus, there is the challenge to: a) increase the capacity of production; b) re-order our production to ensure that future generation's right to a healthy and productive environment is not compromised.

- Involvement in investments;

- Involve all stakeholders in long term planning and budgeting;
- Diversify our apostolate and income yielding projects;
- Train our members adequately;
- Entrench sound accountability and transparency at all levels;
- Maximize the talents of each member;
- Every project/apostolate should be made to be community project and not to be left into the hands of a “sole administrator”,
- Be futuristic in our planning.

## **Way Forward**

We commit ourselves to:

- be inward looking: we should plan our survival. There is a limit to the help our General Houses or home provinces can give us;
- Accountability: The religious of our units (Community, Province, delegations, etc) should know how much that is spent on each member. (And see Code of Canon Law, Canon 1284). Everyone should be made to feel responsible.
- Contribute to the enhancing of the “Economy of Communion”.
- Poor economic planning and policy;
- Be well informed;
- Adopt the universal common law of work;
- Work with Funding Agencies;
- Promote inter-Congregational and Diocesan collaboration;

We recommend that all ecclesial institutions – including religious institutes of consecrated Life – and the civil institutions should find ways of improving sustainability and self-reliance.

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**THE CHURCH IN THE SERVICE OF  
RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE IN  
AFRICA**

*Given 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2009, at Kelly Pastoral Centre Benin City,  
Edo State*

We the members (men and women) of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria have prayerfully discussed and reflected on the theme “*The Church in the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa*” issue the following communiqué.

We resolve that true reconciliation begins from our individual hearts. Each of us as a part of the Church has offended God and hurt each other in the process. Like the Prodigal Son we need to run back to God and say “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I no longer deserve to be called your son .....” (Luke 15:18-19).

We are aware of the conflicts, power tussles, wars, political instability, poverty and hunger on the Continent of Africa, particularly as the adversely affect women and children. We therefore condemn in the strongest terms the political crisis with religious undertones which we have particularly experienced recently in Nigeria at Jos.

We recognize and appreciate the role the Church has played through various organizations and agencies, such as the Justice, Development and Peace Commission

(JDPC), the Justice and Peace Initiative (JPI), the Committee for the support of the Dignity of Women (COSUDOW) and other eminent religious leaders in reducing the scourge of oppression, hunger, and diseases occasioned by the aforementioned problems and anomalies. However, it is our desire that the Church reinforces her effort to proffer a more permanent solution to these problems.

We affirm that we rediscover our African values, e.g integrity, peace and mutual co-existence on the socio-religious levels, which become the basis of our efforts at effecting reconciliation in Africa.

We equally affirm that sincere inter-religious dialogue that promotes respect for and commitment to peaceful existence with people of other religions, especially African Traditional Religion, Islam and other non Christians should be encouraged at every sphere for fruitful conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence.

Recognizing the importance of political stability in advancing human development we strongly condemn the attitude of sit-tight political leaders that inflict untold hardships on the citizenry and in that way they perpetuate their inadvertent hold on power.

Finally, we implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Peace, to assist us in embarking meaningfully in this inevitable onward journey toward



creating a world where peace, justice and reconciliation will flourish.

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## **THE PLACE OF THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THE RELIGIOUS**

*Given 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2010, at Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna,  
Kaduna State*

We, the members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria met at the Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna from January 18 – 22, 2010 with the theme: ‘The place of the Word of God in the Life of the Religious’, having prayerfully reflected and discussed the theme and other pertinent issues relating to our lives as Consecrated persons including issues of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace;

### **We recognize that:**

- The Word of God, both written and unwritten, is power, active and alive, and it is light for the journey of our lives and a basis for discernment. It can make us good disciples of Christ and good citizens of our country.
- The mission of Jesus, the Word of God, is to bring about reconciliation between God and fallen humankind. Jesus lived and preached love, forgiveness and solidarity.
- The Founders and Foundresses and the charism of our individual institutes of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life were inspired by the Word of God. Today, the Word of God continues to inspire our

apostolic action; it provokes and sustains community living. The Charisms of our institutes can be well lived out if the Word of God is made the centre of our lives.

- Consecrated life is a life lived for the Word of God through dedication to the love and service of God and neighbour.
- Reconciliation, justice and peace are relevant and urgent issues and very practical challenges, with heavy political dimensions, which affect the entire community, not only the church members.
- As bearers of the Word of God, we all – laity, Consecrated persons, and clergy – have essential roles to play in fostering justice, peace and reconciliation.
- Witnessing is very important in proclaiming the gospel; the relevance of our life will depend more on how we live than we preach, for the modern man and woman listen more to prophets than to teachers.
- Through our various apostolates we can effectively communicate the Word of God to those we work with and work for.
- God is the Source and Model of reconciliation, justice and peace. Consecrated women and men, being at the heart of the Church – Family of God in Africa, have their special part to play in the service of the Church for reconciliation, justice and peace.

- It is necessary to respect the respective competencies of various segments of the family of God in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace.
- It is important to steer a right course between an over spiritual abdication from concrete concern for the practical needs of our people, and an exaggerated politicization of church in a way that goes outside her legitimate mandate. Maintaining this equilibrium is helpful in addressing conflicts.

**We hereby affirm that:**

- The Church continues to play active role as advocate in promoting reconciliation, justice and peace.
- In an atmosphere of conflict, tribal or racial antagonism, the peaceful living together of consecrated persons in inter-ethnic and inter-racial communities is not only a powerful witness but also a strong incentive for the people to aspire to such lives of harmony across all borders.
- Consecrated persons are called to bear witness through their apostolates. And that many religious communities have made the pursuit of reconciliation, justice and peace a major pillar of their charism. They are never to give up or neglect this duty.

**We, therefore, recommend that:**

- Following the example of Mary who treasured the Word of God in her heart, the Word of God should find a place in our hearts. Without meditating on the Word of God, mere reading of the sacred scriptures will make little impact on our lives in the apostolic mission.
- We emphasize the importance of the witness of life of Consecrated persons within the church as communities of those who are reconciled with God and to one another.
- Consecrated persons should be living witnesses of the Word of God especially by being faithful to their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.
- Consecrated persons should persist in putting the Word of God into practice, and translate it into their daily living.
- Religious institutes must ensure that Sacred Scriptures are taught in their formation houses, and that Religious should cultivate the act of reading and meditating on the Sacred Scriptures.
- Consecrated women and men should ensure that their apostolates and relationship with people are permeated with the Word of God.

- Consecrated persons should continue to promote the culture of peace and justice by always taking the initiative for dialogue and reconciliation.
- Regular joint reflection and planning, guided by the principles of the Catholic moral and Social Teachers, should be encouraged in order to ensure common mind and action for the service of reconciliation, justice and peace Nigeria.
- The Church must engage the lay faithful to be active in the politics of Nigeria, and of Africa, as apostles of reconciliation, justice and peace, moved by the love of God and of neighbour, and guided by the moral and social teachings of the Church.
- All should work for genuine and integral human development, respect for human rights and dignity, care for the needy, and care the earth. Therefore, together with the entire Church in Africa, consecrated men and women must continue to engage in social apostates in areas such as education, health, social communications, social empowerment, and political conscientization and animation.
- All Christians, especially consecrated persons, must commit themselves to bringing about reconciliation, and foster healthy coexistence through dialogue within their religious communities, in the church and in the society. As agents of reconciliation, religious men and

women should avoid utterances and gestures that can lead to the breakdown of peaceful coexistence.

- The Church must continue to deploy all her facilities and forces, with every member of the family of God playing his or her proper role in the service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.

We are conscious of the great human sufferings in different parts of the world. In particular, the recent earthquake in Haiti which claimed thousands of lives; in our own country, the crisis in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, resulting to the death of so many people and rendering even more people homeless, and to the destruction of properties, etc. We therefore call on our governments to intensify the security of persons and ensure protection of properties, preventing escalation of the conflicts. We equally call on Religious Leaders and all people of good will to demonstrate greater solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Jos and Haiti (Cf. James 2:15 - 16).

### **Conclusion**

We ask that, as family of God, everyone - clergy, Consecrated women and men, laity - should advance and spread the knowledge of and personal encounter with the Word of God as well as make concrete and specific efforts to implement the directives and orientations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> African Synod.

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**THE SECOND SPECIAL SYNOD FOR AFRICA:  
PRACTICAL IMPLICATION FOR THE CHURCH IN  
NIGERIA**

*Given 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2011, at Madonna Renewal Centre Nkpor-Agu, Onitsha, Anambra State*

We the members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, met the Madonna Renewal Centre Nkpor-Agu, Onitsha from the 16<sup>th</sup> -22<sup>nd</sup> January 2011, with the theme "Echoes from the Second Special Synod for Africa: Practical Implication for the Church in Nigeria" Having prayerfully reflected, discussed and shared the theme and other issues relating to the church and her mission in Nigeria,

We acknowledge that:

- God in his infinite love and mercy has constituted us into one family of brothers and sisters through the mystery of the incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- As members of the Catholic Church, we are the family of God here on earth and the same blood flows in our veins "the blood of Jesus Christ". This blood challenges us to be truly one and calls us into the mission of the church - *ad intra and ad extra*.
- The "Church - as - family" is further called into a mission of witnessing in reconciliation, justice and peace. By this the church lives out her vocation of the proclamation of the good news to the society and the entire order of creation.



- Our religious Communities and Parishes, where people of different tribes and ethnic groups gather around the Eucharistic table remain the sign of universal bond which the church signifies and realizes.
- Good and holistic formation centred on the person of Christ is the first step in building a great nation and a dynamic and effective church.
- In this year of election we can be more authentic and effective agents of transformation in the cultural, religious, socio-political and economic dilemma in Nigeria, thereby honouring our call to live in community and in communion with respect to the ethnic diversity of our members.
- The church in Nigeria faces the new challenge which calls on Bishops, priests, Deacons, Religious, Seminarians and Laity to further strengthen their cooperation at Diocesan and national levels. The church can effect change in the society only if all her members collaborate effectively.

**We Recommend that:**

- The church in Nigeria should face the challenge of how to internalize and preach the principle of eco-justice, in harmony with the creative world and in honoring the integrity of creation as well as to resist the negative effect of globalization.
- The church and the institutes of consecrated life should ensure an adequate and holistic formation process for priest and Religious that will transcend the

borders of tribalism, ethnicity and embrace the universal brotherhood and sisterhood that life in the church demands.

- The final message of the synod acknowledges the specific contribution of women in the social sphere and recommends that the church in Nigeria put in place concrete structures to ensure the real participation of women at appropriate levels.
- consecrated persons should be more energetic and charismatic in the exercise of their mission and apostolate for a more and deeper transformation of the society.
- The consecrated persons should work towards building a society where values like – justice, peace, charity, and respect for all, especially for the less privileged are upheld.
- We need to foster greater unity and solidarity within the church in Nigeria which appears to be losing her bond of unity and solidarity to the multi-faceted forms of tribalism, ethnicity and violence, raising their heads at various points and areas. The church should be a model of reconciliatory community to the rest of society.
- Issues of violence should be stripped of religious garments and treated in relation to the laws of the land, taking into cognizance the right and privileges of every citizen – tribe and tongue notwithstanding.
- We have to live out our vocation of love authentically to reflect its theological and Christo- centric nature so much that it be said of us “see how much they love one another”.

- Dialogue remains an indispensable tool in order to foster peace and reconciliation, which must be promoted at all level for the resolution of conflicts and differences.
- Adequate attention must be given to the education of our youths especially in the areas of catechesis. The youth must be taught the fundamentals of the faith they profess so as to enable them to live it out faithfully and intelligently.
- Justice is not only about relations between persons, it should also be reflected in our relation to the eco-system; hence we must respect nature in a healthy manner.
- The need to take seriously the initiative around interfaith dialogue - Catholic Church, Islam, Traditional Religion, Protestantism and Pentecostalism. These issues are pastoral, economic and political.
- The need for transparency and accountability in the management of whenever that is entrusted to our care.
- That we remember and pray for those who died in the different crisis across the Country on every second Friday of November.
- That we continue to plead and to work towards poverty alleviation in Nigeria and seek to get loans without interest.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of the situation in Nigeria today as we celebrate 50 years of independence, we pay tribute to what the Catholic Church has contributed to the Nigerian

Society through the prophetic role of her Priests and Religious, and God's blessing on our country.

The message of the special synod for Africa admonishes, "*Africa must not despair*". The blessings of God are still abundantly waiting to be prudently and justly employed for the good of her children.

## **CARING FOR THE CARERS: HEALTH ISSUES**

*Given 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, at the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus  
Generalate, Ikeja, Lagos, Lagos State*

We the members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, at the end of our 45<sup>th</sup> Annual General assembly held at the Sisters of Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Generalate, Ikeja, in the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos from 25<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 with the theme: *Caring for the Carers: Health Issues*, which offered the Major Superiors representing their various religious orders institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life the opportunity to have awareness on issues related to health and its management. Having prayerfully reflected, discussed and shared this theme in relation to other issues bordering on the mission of the Religious Orders, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the challenges of the Church in Nigeria.

We acknowledge that:

- i. God in his love created the human person and placed him at the centre of all creation, gave him the gift of health, the intelligence to develop the science of medicine and healthcare.
- ii. human beings are sometimes however, found to be negligent and less attentive to matters related to their health and the health of others.
- iii. Dirty environment and mismanagement of the eco-system is also seen to be one of the causes of the numerous sicknesses that our people suffer

- today.
- iv. After fifty years of independence the Nigerian government has not shown serious interest in the health of the citizenry. There is no functional health policy or insurance that can guarantee access to health care for everybody.
  - v. Insecurity in the country is without doubt one of the major causes of ill health and sicknesses, has engendered excessive stress, state of fear, psychosomatic illnesses, hypertension and nervous breakdown in the populace of the country.
  - vi. The removal of the fuel subsidy without first of all putting in place palliative measures to reduce its effect is the source of the severe and untold hardship that many Nigerians have been experiencing since the beginning of this year.
  - vii. The witness of the Church, Religious Orders, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and Christians in Northern Nigerian who have remained steadfast in their faith even in the face of the violence and terrorism of the religious fundamentalists is contributing immensely to building a more reconciled Nigeria where justice and peace will reign.

**Taking cognizance of the above facts, we recommend that:**

- i. Human life and health be treasured and protected in every sphere of life by individuals, groups and the government.
- ii. The Nigerian government should implement a

- functional and efficient health policy and insurance scheme that will provide adequate health care delivery for every citizen irrespective of tribe, religion, ethnic group or social status.
- iii. We foster good relationships in our families as a way of reducing the situations that induce stress.
  - iv. We promote the good management and the cleanliness of our environment and the eco-system to reduce the effect of ecologically engendered diseases.
  - v. We remain grateful for both the universal and particular church in the area of inter-religious dialogue. We invite all Christians, Muslims, Corporate bodies, non-governmental organizations and the government to embrace this initiative as one of the effective means to foster peace, unity, development and calmness in this country.
  - vi. Government at all levels to devise and implement the means of addressing the challenges of insecurity in the country.
  - vii. Christians and Religious Orders, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life remain steadfast in their witness to Christ and not see the recent crisis in the Northern part of the country as a reason to abandon their mission.
  - viii. The corporate bodies and the people of goodwill to support Religious Orders, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in their effort to take care of the victims of violence in the Northern

part of Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

In this moment of the history of our dear country Nigeria, when terrorism and violence are on a daily and rapid increase across the country, we denounce unambiguously all these forms of violence, terrorism, kidnapping, human trafficking and criminality.

We pray that the Almighty God may grant eternal rest to the souls of those who died as a result of the terrorist attacks and bombardments in the North. We also commiserate with their family members, friends and relatives and ask God to give them the courage and fortitude to bear the loss. We believe that the blood they have shed during the course of these crises will plead more insistently than that of Abel for the salvation of our country Nigeria.



## **NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY**

*Given 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2012, at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja*

Superiors of Male and Female Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life across the Country with their Secretaries and, Communication Officers at the end of the seminar on NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY held At Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Lugbe, Abuja, May 3-5, 2012, issue the following resolutions:

- That Communication is of absolute necessity to the evangelizing mission of the Church particularly in this era of new media technologies.
- That the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria give priority attention to the communication work of the Church through provision of all necessary facilities particularly in the area of personnel training and procurement of modern day equipment for the work of the Pastoral Agents. They need also to create an enabling environment for the religious congregations to operate.
- That Superiors of Religious Congregations should also endeavour to train their members in communication studies, and also make funds available for the procurement of modern communication equipment.
- That Major Superiors of Religious Institutes should as a matter of urgency implement the new curriculum and include training in communication in the

programmes of formation of their members in order for them to be well grounded in the area of communication in general and Information Technology in particular.

- That Religious Houses/Formation Centers should collaborate and cooperate with the Directorate of Social Communication of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria [CSN] in the area of implementation of programmes for proper formation in communication technology.
- While commending Religious Congregation which already have Communication Directorates manned by competent personnel, and a functional website, we encourage those who do not have to do so as a matter of urgency.
- That all pastoral agents should positively use modern Information Technology like text messaging and Facebook to enhance both Spiritual and Social lives of the faithful entrusted to their care.
- The Directorate of Social Communication of the Catholic Secretariat should assist the Directors of Communication in the Religious Congregations to be formed into a functional body
- That the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria through the Episcopal Chairman for Communication, Most Rev. Emmanuel Badejo and Rev Fr. Ralph Madu, Director of the Social Communications, Directorate of Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria [CSN] deserve unquantifiable thanks for organizing this Seminar while we hope to have more of it.
- Special gratitude also to the facilitators – Rev. Frs.

Joseph Faniran, Walter Ihejirika, Martin Yina MSP,  
Gabriel Avbenake OP, and Innocent Uwah for a job  
well done.

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## **RELIGIOUS AND FAITH CRISIS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

*Given 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2013, at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat  
and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja*

We the Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Nigeria, gathered from 20<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> January at DRACC, Sabon-Lugbe, Abuja. Having prayerfully reflected and deliberated on the theme: *Religious and Faith Crisis in the Contemporary World*, came up with the following:

The declaration of the year of faith by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, affords us the opportunity for a deeper reflection on the faith we profess and live. This declaration presupposes a re-awakening of our faith and calls us to a new evangelization. Despite the appearances and the explosion of religiosity that we witness in our society, we are also affected by the crisis of faith that has rocked our world today. Faith as a theological virtue helps us to belief that which we do not see. The one who possesses this virtue is one in whom there is a disposition to do what is good.

We therefore acknowledge that:

- Faith is a gift from God and He is its sole object.
- Faith in God is made manifest through good works (Jas 2:7)
- Unfaithfulness on the other hand manifests itself in Heresy, Apostasy, Blasphemy and other human actions that negate the good.

**While we acknowledge that faith crisis is part and parcel of our spiritual growth, we also acknowledge the power and grace of God to overcome this crisis. In the light of this, we recommend that:**

- We rediscover and renew our faith, through the reading of the Scriptures, a more active participation in the Sacred Liturgy and a deeper prayer life.
- We study more intensely Church documents like the Vatican II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Social Teachings of the Church, etc., for a better understanding and appreciation of our faith.
- We strive against secularism, materialism, consumerism and intellectualism which are prominent factors that militate against our faith.
- The concept of the family as the domestic church should be upheld as this is a fertile ground for the transmission of faith from one generation to the next.
- Against the backdrop of the violence and fear that we are experiencing in our country today, we become more open to dialogue in order to foster communal love and faith building environment.
- The authentic teaching of the Church should be upheld by all Christians as opposed to giving-in to private and Pentecostal interpretation of individuals.
- That leaders be sensitive to the well-being of their members and show concern for those undergoing faith crisis.
- Greater attention should be given to the development of the human person over and above economic advantages.

- Civil and religious leaders be the first to show obedience to the Rules and Constitutions guiding their institutes and must encourage others to do the same, since the credibility of leaders cannot be overemphasized.

### **Conclusion**

The call to re-awaken our faith reminds us that every Christian is an agent of evangelization and called to an authentic witnessing, especially in the face of the growing threat to our Christian faith. We recommend all to God's protection and the maternal care of the Virgin Mary.

## **APPENDIX**

### **THE HISTORY OF THE CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF NIGERIA (MEN)**

The Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (MEN) was formed in 1970, at Ibadan. The newly established Conference was made up of the leaders of institutes and congregations of religious priests and brothers in Nigeria. It was organized in response to the request of Pope Pius XII who, in 1950, urged religious around the world to come together in national associations. At its foundation, it was named the Nigeria National Conference of Major Superiors (NNCMS). As a male conference, it existed for many years alongside the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR). However, in January 1988, at a meeting of male religious in Jos, it was suggested that there be a joint meeting of men and women superiors.

It was discussed again in 1989 and actualized in February 1990 at Awka. However, at the Joint Executive Meeting of March 1992, following the decision of the Women's Conference to apply for land in the new Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, it was decided that the two bodies should have a joint assembly, while they kept their separate identities. Since then, there have been Annual Joint Meetings and regular meetings of the Joint Executive Councils of the two groups. And over the years, cooperation between the two groups has increased, and the benefits of this collaboration have become more apparent. The need for and advantages of further cooperation in areas of interest for the service of the

## *Appendix*

Church and the people of Nigeria has become increasingly clear.

Amidst challenges, the Conference for male religious continued to function. Twenty five years after its establishment, on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1995 the Conference celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the Foundation of the Conference: from 1970-1995 in a Symposium at the Pastoral Institute, Bodija, Ibadan. On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1995, the Conference celebrated a Solemn Pontifical Mass of thanksgiving, which was presided over by His Grace, Most Revd. Dr. Felix Alaba Job, the Archbishop of Ibadan, in the Chapel of the Pastoral Institute, Ibadan. It was followed by a reception. The choice of Ibadan and the Archbishop for the celebration of the Mass was significant; for it was in Ibadan that the Nigeria National Conference of Major Superiors started twenty five years earlier.

During the 1990's, an Institute for Formators, Du, Jos was already run by the women's wing of the Conference. However, in 1995 during the Annual Combined General Meeting of the two Conferences, the Institute was opened to the male religious. By September 1996, the male religious were already part of the institute. It served both conferences for some time until it collapsed for lack of personnel. However, at the Executive Council Meeting of the Conference in January 2004, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013 was slated for the reopening of the institute as the Sisters of Mercy and Claretian Missionaries buoyed up the hope of the institute by providing the core staff members.



## *Appendix*

To help the decisions of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria to reach the grassroots, at a general meeting at Owerri in 2002, the Conference decided to hold regional meetings, with each region charged with a particular responsibility. The regions were: Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, and Enugu. The Conference has also made several efforts to see that she reflects the reality of the Church in Nigeria and the Universal Church at all times; and thus her statutes have been revised several times as the need demands. Apart from the statutes that came with the foundation of the Conference in 1970, in 2005 they were reviewed and revised. With the expansion and development of the Conference, it was reviewed again in 2010.

All these years, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (MEN) has shared in the Church's great responsibility of new evangelization, which is centered on conversion to the truth and love of Christ and, consequently, the spiritual and moral rebirth of individuals and societies. Encountering Jesus Christ shapes its members, committing them to fellowship and to overcoming injustice. It has supported leaders of the various congregations and societies, promoted dialogue and collaboration among leaders of religious institutes and with the Catholic Church and society. It has provided and continues to provide a corporate influence and voice for male religious leaders through its national and regional structures. The passing of each year introduces the conference into new episodes full of hope and promise for the Church, local and universal. May God bless the Conference Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men).