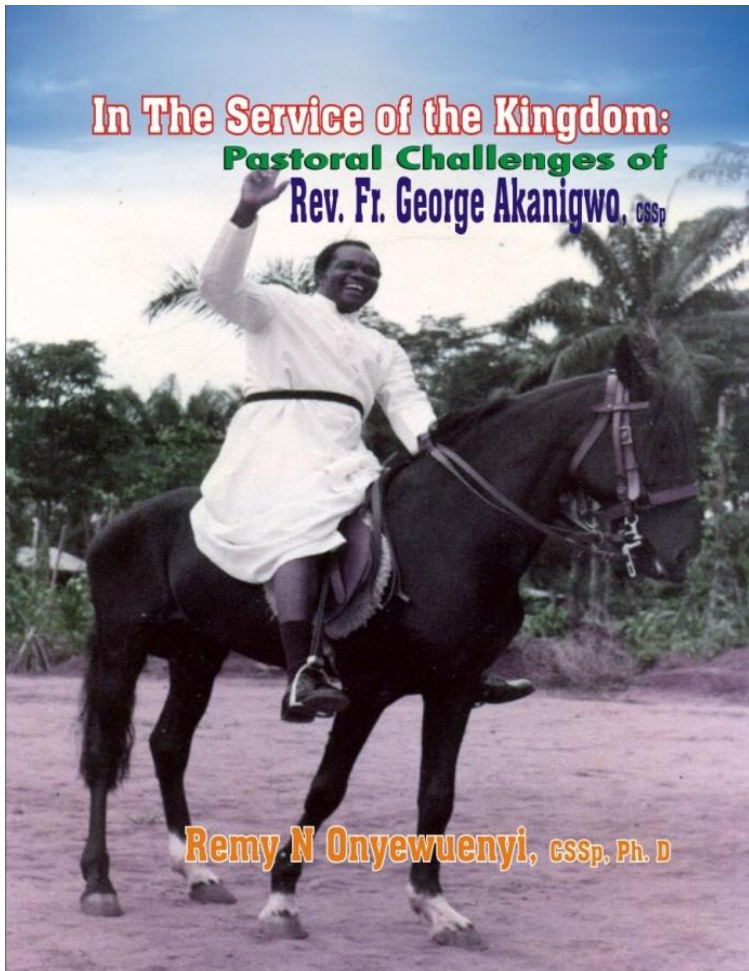


In The Service of the Kingdom: Pastoral Challenges of Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp



**In The Service of the Kingdom:
Pastoral Challenges of
Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp**

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Contents

Chapter 1	7
Introduction	
Chapter 2	11
Profile of Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo	
Chapter 3	15
St. Mary's Catholic Parish, Ngwo: August 19, 1973-August 10, 1975	
Chapter 4	33
St. Michael's Catholic Parish, Awgu: August 10, 1975-August 10, 1978	
Chapter 5	47
St. Patrick's Parish, Obollo-Eke/Obollo-Afor: August 10, 1978-August 10, 1979	
Chapter 6	54
St. Joseph's Catholic Parish, Aguleri: August 10, 1979-November 26, 1979	
Chapter 7	56
St. Anthony's Catholic Parish, Isieniu-Nsukka: November 26, 1979-August 10, 1986	

Chapter 8	67
Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Parish, Woliwo-Onitsha: June 8, 1986-January 13, 1997	
Chapter 9	74
St. Peter's Catholic Parish, Oko: January 14, 1997-July 2007	
Chapter 10	81
St. Michael's Catholic Parish, Ezinifite: August 3, 2007-October 2010	
Chapter 11	85
Fr. George Akanigwo's Practical Ways of Living Celibate Life	
Chapter 12	98
Fr. George's Litany of the Saints for Chaste Life	
Chapter 13	101
Testimonies on the Life and Works of Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp	

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

I am happy that this biography of Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp detailing some of his pastoral challenges over these 37 years has seen the light of day. It took a long time in the making and I am very grateful to God for making this publication possible at this time. Fr. George had threatened me a number of times with hellfire if he didn't see a copy of this book before he gets to heaven. Knowing him, if he gets there before me, it will be "Heaven help me". I thank him for his patience and understanding. I thank him too for his enormous contribution in cash and draft materials that facilitated the completion of this work. May he enjoy the fruits of his labour.

In the Service of the Kingdom: Pastoral Challenges of Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp is a chronological account of some of the major events in the life and works of Fr. George Akanigwo, a Holy Ghost priest of the Province of Nigeria South East, in the parishes of the various Catholic dioceses he worked between 1973 and 2010. As a young priest he was full of energy and zeal; and with these he was able to meet head-on with the challenges/situations of some of these difficult missions. His pastoral experiences span over nine parishes with over a hundred outstations in all. The challenges in these parishes are treated in separate chapters. Some chapters are longer than others based on

the materials treated. The book has 13 chapters in all including this Introduction.

In the Service of the Kingdom: Pastoral Challenges of Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp is written in plain English and narrative style; no attempts were made at interpretation and analysis. The reader can enjoy the stories as told and draw his/her own lessons. I am sure that there are lots of pastoral and social lessons to be learned from this simple and unassuming book on the life and works of a simple Religious in a mission situation.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who collaborated with Fr. George Akanigwo in his ministry in the Lord's vineyard all these years. These include his Religious Superiors and confreres, The Local Ordinaries, Co-Apostolic workers, various Parish Communities, various civil communities and organisations, military and law enforcement agencies, and those too who presented the most difficult challenges for Fr. Akanigwo. Just as Fr. George was enriched by your cooperation and challenges, I hope that God enriched you equally through his services and sacrifices.

As Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp, goes into retirement from active ministry in the Lord's vineyard, it is my wish that we accompany him with this refrain of fond sentiments and gratitude for a service well done:

Soldier rest your active warfare is over.
You have fought many good fights and battles;

You have run the race to the finish:
From St. Mary's Ngwo to St. Michael's Ezinifite;
Nine parishes in all with over a hundred outstations!
For over 37 good years,
Stretching from August 1973 to December 2010
You may look frail and sedentary now;
Now a mere shadow of

your former self;
You were once a firebrand; a "Charger"
When you had the energy, you made the best out of
it;
Serving God and neighbour in His Church and world;
You will always be remembered as "Charger"
And "Power per se";
Fighting in the service of the Kingdom
He will surely and handsomely reward you,
He whom you generously and faithfully served,
When the tent of your earthly dwelling is dismantled
Brave and ever courageous fighting Fr. George,
Your Lord, Master and Rewarder is waiting for you
With open arms and beaming smiles.
Do not fear, Great George.
Be of good cheer, Fr. George Akanigwo.
Well done, great Holy Ghost Father George.

Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Remy N Onyewuenyi, CSSp
Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans)
Province of Nigeria South East



Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp

Chapter 2

PROFILE OF REV. FR. GEORGE AKANIGWO, CSSp

Fr. George Akanigwo was born on June 4, 1940 to late Mr. Akanigwo Nwemazu and late Mrs. Monica Ugwunwa Akanigwo of Umudimogo village, Ihiala in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Fr. George did his secondary education at the Holy Ghost Juniorate, Ihiala from 1960 to 1965. He joined the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers as a novice at the Holy Ghost Novitiate, Awo-Omamma (1966-1967) and made his First Religious Profession in 1967. He did the one year Prefecting Programme at the Holy Ghost Juniorate, Ihiala from 1967-1968.

After his philosophy and theology studies at the Holy Ghost Scholasticate, Awo-Omamma and Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu respectively from 1968 to 1973, Rev. George Akanigwo was ordained a Catholic priest in the Holy Ghost Congregation on April 29, 1973 at St. Martin's Catholic Church, Ihiala by His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze, the then Archbishop of Onitsha.

Since his ordination, Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp has worked in the following parishes:

1. St. Mary's Catholic Church, Ngwo, Enugu Diocese, covering Army Barracks, 9th Mile Corner, Hilltop and

- St. Mark's Catholic Church, Nsude, an outstation then, from 19th August 1973 to 10th August 1975.
2. St. Michael's Catholic Church, Awgu, now in Awgu Diocese: 10th August 1975 to 10th August 1978. The parish had eleven outstations then, one of which, Okpanku, is about 45 miles away from the main Parish Centre.
 3. Obollo-Eke/Obollo-Afor Parishes in Nsukka Diocese from 10th August 1978 to 10th August 1979.
 4. St. Joseph's Catholic Parish, Aguleri in Onitsha Archdiocese from 10th August 1979 to 26th November 1979.
 5. St. Anthony's Parish, Isienu, Nsukka Diocese from 26th November 1979 to 10th August 1986. The parish then had 25 outstations. While at Isienu, Fr. Akanigwo built some of the outstations into full-fledged parishes. Examples are St. George's Ishiulo and St. Jacob's Oba, whose church is currently one of the biggest in Nsukka diocese; next to the Cathedral.
 6. Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Woliwo, Onitsha Archdiocese from June 8, 1986 to January 13, 1997 as the first Parish Priest, assisted by late Rev. Fr. Boniface Ochionu, C.S.Sp.
 7. St. Peter's Catholic Parish, Oko, Awka Diocese from January 14, 1997 to July 2007. With the help of God, Fr. George completed the church building and made it one of the most beautiful churches in the diocese.
 8. St. Michael's Catholic Parish, Ezinifite, Nnewi Diocese from August 2007 to 2010. While in Ezinifite, Fr. George was attacked by armed robbers who brutalized him on October 16, 2009. By this attack,

he said: "I fulfilled in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body in the Church (Col. 1:24). I have read the Scripture at the last, I came to understand the words of Zachariah the Prophet 'What are these wounds on your face... The wounds I received in the house of my friends' (Zech. 13:6). Following St. Paul, I can now assert that I was 'in danger from robbers' (2 Cor. 11:26). In all these cases I follow my Lord Jesus and pray: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34)."

These nine parishes in which Fr. George Akanigwo exercised his pastoral duties for over 37 years have now more than 30 independent parishes. To God be the glory.

Other offices held:

1. Fr. George Akanigwo was appointed Vicar for the Religious by His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Michael Eneja from 1979 to 1986.
2. His Grace, Archbishop Stephen Ezeanya, Onitsha Archdiocese appointed him the Promoter of the National Eucharistic Congress held at Owerri in 1992; Member, Onitsha Archdiocesan Marian Year +Committee, 1987; Vicar for Religious, Onitsha Archdiocese, 1990-1996; and Chaplain, Catholic Teachers' Association, Onitsha Archdiocese.

As a retired and tired soldier of Christ, "Charger" Fr. George O Akanigwo now resides at the Holy Ghost Haven, Mgbidi in

Imo State. He still quotes the Scriptures in season and out of season.



*Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp
Parish Priest & Footballer
St. Anthony's Parish, Isienu-Nsukka*

Chapter 3

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC PARISH, NGWO

August 19, 1973-August 10, 1975

Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo's first missionary and pastoral appointment after priestly ordination on April 29, 1973 was to St. Mary's Catholic Church, Ngwo in Enugu Diocese. The mission then covered Army Barracks, 9th Mile Corner, Hilltop and St. Mark's Catholic Church, Nsude. An Igbo adage says that a bachelor did not know when he passed his future in-law's compound. This was the case with Fr. George *-Akanigwo, CSSp and his first bride parish, St. Mary's Catholic Parish, Ngwo. During his four-year theological studies at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu Fr. George had many times passed through Ngwo town which stretched from the 9th Mile Corner through the former Hilltop to the edge of the Milky Hill.

After moderating a four-day retreat at Alor in the then Nnokwa Parish, Fr. George Akanigwo left for Ngwo on August 19, 1973 on his motor cycle with Registration Number ECN 7447 which he received as an ordination gift from St. Martin's Parish, Ihiala. The rest of his luggage was brought down to Ngwo later on during the week by Rev. Fr. Dr. Christopher Ifenatuora, an elder priest from his home town and parish, St. Martin's Parish, Ihiala. He arrived at Ngwo parish compound at 6.30 pm dressed in mufti and shivering, having been soaked to the skin by a heavy rain

which fell on him from Awka to Ngwo town. The few people he met on arrival did not recognise him as a Rev. Father and their new Parish Priest because he was not in a clerical dress. Some of the Mass-servers around laughed at this shivering man who rode in on a motorbike. It was only when his predecessor, Rev. Fr. Dr. Anthony Aso (now a Monsignor), came and introduced him as the new Parish Priest that the Mass-servers and others felt sorry for the cold welcome and reception to their new “Motorbike riding Parish Priest”.



Father's House, St. Mary's Parish, Ngwo 1973

Msgr. Aso quickly gave him the handover note and showed him the essential places in the Parish house. There was no church building as such, but a School-Church building. After the handover, Msgr. Aso left that night for Enugu. Since he had no one else to meet or consult for more information on his new mission for now, he went straight to the Chapel and told Jesus that he has come to do his will.



*Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp with Members of the Parish Council,
St. Mary's Parish, Ngwo*

Ngwo Catholic Church/Community has been fighting for survival for many years; to date, the struggle continues. This is so because Ngwo town is the most predominant Protestant town in Enugu diocese. By the 1974 census, it had 12 different Christian denominations, excluding the pagans and non-conformists. For one to be employed in the Coal Corporation then he or she would have to renounce his/her religion or faith if he/she is not Protestant – the denomination of the Personnel Manager. On account of the heavy presence of Protestants in the town, real Catholic wedding for the Catholic girls was a real challenge. Most of the Mixed Marriages never worked out well as the brides were later constrained to adopt the religion/faith of their Protestant husbands. The few Catholics who wanted to keep the tenets of their faith were ostracized in their villages.

Welcoming Fr. George Akanigwo formally, the Catholic community in its Welcome Address drew attention to two of its primary needs and wishes: Erection of a Church building, and the handing over of the Maternity to the Catholic Bishop of Enugu, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey M.P. Okoye, CSSp. Fr. Akanigwo listened with rapped attention, reflecting on which of the assignments to tackle first. As a stranger still in his new area of jurisdiction, he had to thread his way carefully and in good time too. While he set out, by the grace of God, to face the two set objectives, he experienced some setbacks which he considered as temptations that must be overcome.

Motor cycle and Fire Accident

Fr. George Akanigwo's treasured ordination gift by his home parish – a motor cycle – caught fire in the Presbytery on the eve of the 13th Anniversary of Nigerian Independence, September 30, 1973. The bike was parked in the parlour of the Fathers' House. About 7.30 pm while Fr. George was in the Chapel conversing with the Lord, the house-boy, Fidelis Ede, called him to say that the motor cycle was on fire. Fr. George dashed out of the Chapel to find the bike really on fire and burning badly. He tried to call for additional help but none came immediate since the parishioners were living very far from the mission. So with the help of the two soldiers on duty, he and the house-boy fought gallantly with the heap of sand in the compound and saved the house from total destruction. Only the parlour, the motorbike and the seats in the parlour were reduced to semi-ashes. According to the house-boy, Fidelis Ede, some fuel was gushing out of the motorbike's fuel tank when he passed by

with a lit kerosene lamp. The motorbike caught fire immediately he passed by it.

The remains of these burnt down materials greeted the parishioners who came in the next morning for the Independence Anniversary Mass. Imagining a worse-case scenario, they gave thanks to God for saving the Parish house. Immediately after the Eucharistic celebration, the Christian Mothers and the Catholic Girls cleaned up the place and the Parish Council held an emergency meeting. The next day, the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye, CSSp was at the scene on a sympathy visit. Within a week, the damaged part of the house was fixed and the burnt furniture replaced. The solidarity was both overwhelming and very reassuring.

For those who believe and love God everything works unto good (Cf. Rom. 8:28). The burning of the motorbike was a blessing in disguise pastorally. Before the incident, Fr. George used to zoom past his parishioners on the motorbike without exchanging many greetings on the way. In the absence of the motorbike, he had to do all the Sick-calls on foot: trekking. This afforded him more intimate and close interaction with the parishioners; an interaction and contact that helped him to know his parishioners and their problems better. The children got to know him better at close quarters; the aged and convalescents at home were happy to see him sit down and chat with them. Before he knew it, he was getting more calls to visit the sick in many villages. God paves his own way for the salvation of his people. The number of converts grew according to God's

plan and inspiration – *Laus Deo Semper*. By the time he got a new motorbike on March 1, 1974, most of his parishioners were known to him by homes and names.

Fr. George Akanigwo waited for five months to have the motorbike replaced. He refused the parishioners' offer to have it replaced. He rather waited for the Insurance Company to live up to its obligations because the motorbike was comprehensively insured. The Company eventually paid N450.00 and the Parish Council contributed the sum of N120.00 for a new motorbike. Who says that Insurance companies do not pay? Consult Fr. "Charger" Akanigwo and he will tell you how to make them pay.

The Obiageli Women Dance and the Catholic Women

The Obiageli Women Dance was a famous women's dance for all married women of Ngwo Uno which is made up of three villages: Amaeke, Amankwo and Uborji, where the majority of the Catholic members came from. The dancing troupe had won laurels in dancing competitions in the then Udi Division. It was usually invited to perform at big occasions or events in Enugu. It had even been to Lagos to perform.

The principal organizers and patrons of the Obiageli Women Dance were pagans, Protestants and lapsed-Catholics who tried to enforce some practices which were inimical to good Christian and Catholic faith practices. For example, it was mandatory that before any outing all women dancers would go to the *Ifueke* shrine (the Juju or god of the town) to prostrate and invoke its protection for a safe journey. Most of the members who were Catholics were not comfortable

with this practice of “worshipping” *Ifueke*. The daring ones who refused to go to the shrine were automatically ostracized and dismissed from the group. The ostracization had severe consequences: no funeral or burial, no visits of any kind to their houses, no buying from or selling to them in the village markets. In other words, these victims were tabooed.



*Chief & Lolo Ayalusu (Igwe Asaa of Ngwo)
Treasurer, Parish Council Ngwo at the time of Fr. Akanigwo*

The organizers and patrons were appealed to consider the feelings and faith of some of their members. The appeals

fell on deaf ears. For them, *Ifueke* ruled the day. Period! When the case was reported to Fr. Akanigwo, the new Parish Priest, he could not believe his ears. He told the Catholic women to give him some time. In the meantime, he consulted the Lord while making proper and detailed investigations. The consultations and investigations led to the following decisions a few weeks later:

1. All Catholic members of the Obiageli Women Dance must withdraw their membership of the group with immediate effect. Failure to comply, the Parish Priest will not come for Sick-calls to the persons concerned.
2. All Catholic women from the three villages are to start their own dance group at the compound of Mr. Festus Ani at Amankwo Ngwo, the centre of the three villages. The roll-call shall be taken by the Parish Priest himself. Late comers shall be locked out.
3. If any of the Catholic women suffers any mishap: death of husband or child, all the other women from the three villages shall be there to console her.
4. A special Sunday was chosen to communicate the decisions. All Ngwo people were to be invited to this public declaration. The event must be given wide publicity.

On the appointed day, after Communion, the Parish Priest, Fr. George Akanigwo, gave them what he saw as the mind of the Lord whom he consulted. Some people applauded the decisions while some others raised objections. But Fr. Akanigwo was emphatic: "*Roma locuta causa finita est* (Rome has spoken, the case is closed). If you want to be a

Catholic, follow the directives; if you want Obiageli, the doors of the Church are open for you to leave to hell.”

A week or so later, on the appointed day, the Catholic Women Dance group – *Egwu Ndi Uka* was inaugurated. Within five weeks of its inauguration, the compound could no longer accommodate the members as former hesitant Catholics and converts from Traditional Religion began to enroll in their numbers into *Egwu Ndi Uka*. This was really a death knell for Obiageli and its organizers and patrons. The Lord won the victory to the blossoming of the Catholic faith in Ngwo Parish.

The Cooperation of the Soldiers

With the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war in January 1970, Federal Forces were still stationed at strategic locations, especially in the big towns of the former held Biafran areas of the Federation. Those stationed in Enugu, the capital of the then East Central State, who had no adequate accommodation were camped at the Hilltop and 9th Mile Corner. These places were all part of Fr. George’s Ngwo Parish. The relationship between the soldiers and the natives was not that cordial. There was mutual distrust between them; each feared the other.

As the Acting Chaplain for the two Army Barracks, Fr. Akanigwo celebrated two Masses every Friday, one in each of the Barracks at 10 am and 12 noon, respectively. In addition, he had to do something to heal the strained relationship between the soldiers and their host community, the towns’ people. First, Fr. George started by

involving the Catholic soldiers in the parish work. Two soldiers were detailed to guard the Mission premises every night from 6 pm to 6 am. This was also the “*quid pro quo*” remuneration which Fr. George received for his Acting and non-paying chaplaincy job. Next he formed a statutory group in the parish known as “Catholic Tenants Association”. The soldiers were adequately represented at the meetings of this Association. A representation was thought wise as the presence of all the soldiers would be very intimidating, especially to the “idle civilian” villagers.

This Association proved very helpful in bridging the gap between the two distrusting communities. The contributions of the soldiers for the Church building and 1974 Bazaar surprised the parishioners and opened new doors of cooperation and collaboration between the soldiers and the host parish community. The Lord paved another way: the civilians and soldiers working together to build up the Kingdom of God in a difficult and problem-riddled situation. To Him be the glory.

St. Anne’s Maternity Home, Ngwo Uno

During one of the Pastoral Visits of the then Catholic Bishop of Enugu, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye, CSSp, to Ngwo the people of Ngwo Uno handed over the management of the Community Maternity Home to the Catholic Church. Prior to this, the administration of the Home had passed through many hands without improvement. With the posting of Fr. George to Ngwo Parish, the Bishop instructed him to meet the Matron of Mother of Christ Maternity Hospital, Ogui-

Enugu, Rev. Sr. Mary Pauline, IHM for the re-activation of the dilapidated Ngwo Uno Maternity Home.

Following the recommendations of Rev. Sr. Mary Pauline, His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye in no time provided all the equipment needed for the rehabilitation and reactivation of the Home. He also chose a date – Saturday before Palm Sunday, 1974 – for the reopening of the Maternity Home. Fr. George consulted the Bishop on the new name for the Maternity Home. The Bishop asked him to suggest a name. Recalling the story of Anne in 1 Samuel and the problem of barren families in our society, he had no difficulty choosing a name for the Home: St. Anne’s Maternity Home, Ngwo Uno.

In preparation for the opening ceremony, Fr. Akanigwo commissioned a sign-writer to prepare three signposts with the inscription “St. Anne’s Maternity Home, Ngwo Uno”. These were to be mounted at strategic points along the roads leading to the site. Everybody was looking forward to the reopening of the Maternity maybe with the exception of a few. The proposed Chairman for the occasion was the Personnel Manager of the Coal Corporation, the son of the place. At about 12.30 p.m. on Friday, the day before the event, the proposed Chairman gave Fr. George one of the rude shocks of his life when he drove in to say: “Reverend Gentleman, what is St. Anne? Go immediately and remove the signboards bearing that name, or else there will be an uprising in the three villages and consequently, tomorrow’s function will not hold. It is not a Roman Catholic Maternity.” Fr. Akanigwo’s extempore reply to him was: “Go yourself

and remove the signposts and you pay the Bishop all the money he spent to renovate the Maternity immediately". The Chairman drove off in anger and Fr. Akanigwo went into the house angry too. He later went to the Chapel to consult the Lord on what to do next at this very late hour. The Lord heard him and directed him on what to do.

After the Stations of the Cross that Friday, Fr. George called for an emergency meeting of the key people from Ngwo Uno to brief them on the insulting message from the proposed Chairman. After Fr. George had finished his narration the people like one man echoed: "This same trouble maker again; this man again after the case of Obiageli. This will happen over our dead bodies." They reassured Fr. George and pleaded with him to leave the matter for them.

On Saturday, April 6, 1974 the Bishop arrived an hour before the function. After Fr. George had briefed him on the situation on ground, he (Fr. George) requested the Bishop to allow him to say something before the Bishop, as the Guest of Honour, would respond to the people's Welcome Address. His Lordship obliged him. The opening ceremony began at 10.00 a.m. at the Maternity site. Even though there were dances, music and entertainment some people, especially non-Catholics, were not very amused. The proposed Chairman seemed to have poisoned the mind of some people as there were visible signs of anger and resentment on the faces of some people present. It was alleged that he told some of his people the "*Ndi Uka Fada*" had sold their community Maternity. The insinuation was

very divisive for a small community that has had many trials in the past.

As the function was drawing to a close and it was time for the Bishop to address the people, he invited Fr. George as the Parish Priest to say something first. The Spirit of the Lord spoke through his unworthy servant. Fr. Akanigwo addressed the people in their dialect and pleaded with them to listen attentively to a passage from the Bible. Noticing that one of the people with the Bishop at the High Table was a Protestant Pastor, Fr. George handed him a copy of the Bible and asked him to read from 1 Samuel 1 and 2. The story was the case of the barrenness of Hannah; her husband's love for her not minding her barrenness; the Lord's consoling answer to her prayers to confound her rivals. At the end of the reading, Fr. George asked the women present if there were any who are experiencing what Hannah experienced before God answered her prayers with a gift of a baby boy. There was a thundering "Yes" from the crowd. Fr. Akanigwo then explained: "I chose St. Anne as the Patron Saint of the Maternity so that all women like her might get the same answer from the all merciful Lord. Since someone has poisoned your minds by telling you that your maternity has been sold, I will now go and remove the signposts." The crowd rose with a shout: "It will never happen. The signposts have come to stay".

The Protestant Chairman could not believe his ears at the people's reaction. He was visibly angry with Fr. Akanigwo but he could not stop the crowd. The Lord works through his people and in his own ways. It was another victory for

the Catholics of Ngwo Uno. When the jubilant crowd settled down, His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye, CSSp then made his closing remarks in which he thanked everybody and encouraged the community to work together as a body for the wellbeing of all the members. Before departure, he gave all present His Episcopal Blessing.

The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God

Ngwo town, as mentioned earlier, was the most Protestant town in the then Enugu Diocese. Each denomination strove to survive. Less than ten Catholic families by then could be reckoned as well to do or very rich. The Coal Corporation which was the main means of youth employment then was under the control of a Protestant Personnel Manager who tended to favour Protestants in job offers. He also used his position and job opportunities as means of winning converts to his denomination. Therefore, to get a job at Coal Corporation you must most likely become a Protestant, if you are not one already. Because most of the well-to-do young men in Udi by then were Protestants many of the Catholic girls were forced to abandon their Catholic faith at marriage with Protestant suitors and husbands. Well-to-do Catholic suitors were very hard to come by.

As God would have it, the Sunday homilies and evening instructions which were drawn from the Sacred Scriptures began to bear fruit. The Catholic doctrines were equally confirmed by citations from the Scriptures. Their eyes were being opened as their ignorance was being dispelled. The youth who were formerly mesmerized by their Protestant neighbours who quoted left, right and centre from the

Bible, were now able counter and challenge them from the Scriptures too.

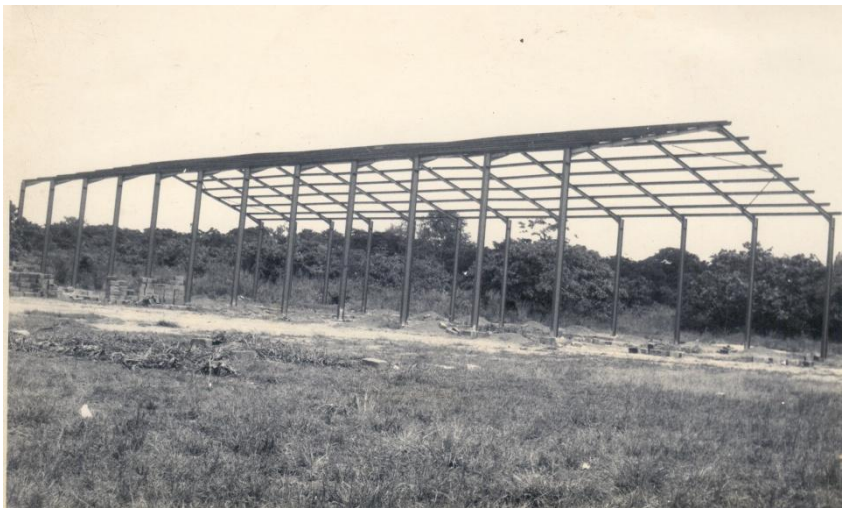
Because Fr. Akanigwo was another Bishop Michael Eneja in the use of Bible quotations in his homilies and teachings, even non-Catholics came on Sundays to listen to the word of God. Because he was drawing many Christians to his Church community, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) group tried to stem off the outflow of their members by posting two more pastors, bringing the number to three, to the small town of Ngwo: one to man Ngwo Uno, one to man Ngwo Asaa and the other who taught at Colliery Comprehensive School had residence at Ngwo Girls' College. In spite of this the number of Catholics continued to grow both in the town and colleges. The Catholic students could now comfortably prove the Catholic doctrines from the Scriptures.

While the faith of the Catholics was being proved and confirmed from the Scriptures, the Personnel Manager who used Protestantism as a means of employment was removed from office. His successor was more liberal. At the same time, many non-Catholics embraced the faith. The Church building was no longer big enough to accommodate those who came for the evening instructions.

The Church Building Project

The commencement of the Church building project was the next thing that endeared Fr. George Akanigwo to the people. The Bazaar activities of 1973, 1974 and the launching in 1975 raised N18,000.00 (Eighteen thousand

naira) for the erection of a church building. With N18,000.00 at hand and the land for the proposed church building in place, a building company in Port Harcourt was contracted to erect the building at a cost of N24,000.00. The Catholic community got a loan of N6,000.00 from Sir and Lady Anthony Oji to offset the difference. The delivery of the stanchions for the building began almost immediately. With this development Fr. George was looking forward to seeing a roof on the church building in no distant time, not knowing the surprise God had in store for him; “Man proposes but God disposes”.



St. Mary's Church Ngwo under construction in 1975 when Fr. Akanigwo was reposted.

During the week, Fr. George went to the Bishop's House in Enugu to check and collect his mail. Surprisingly one of the mails he collected was a Letter of Transfer to St. Michael's Awgu. He was to report at his new parish on August 10th

1975. When he got back to Ngwo and broke the news of his transfer to Awgu to the Parish Council there was a big uproar in the parish. The Catholic Women Organisation (CWO), the Parish Council and the Youths sent delegates to the Bishop to withdraw the Letter of Transfer. The delegation arrived at the Bishop's House only to discover that the Bishop had travelled overseas. To say the least, the delegates could not hide their disappointment. Fr. George Akanigwo as an obedient Religious moved into St. Michael's Catholic Parish on August 10th, 1975.

When eventually the Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye, CSSp, came back in September 1975, the Ngwo people went to him requesting that Fr. George be brought back to Ngwo parish. The Bishop's reply to their request was: "*Obu soso unu ga-eri ife di mma. Oburu na Fada Akanigwo di unu mma, luo olu di mma nebe-unu, ka O jeekwanu ebe ozo. Obughi so unu ka e chiri ya fada?*" (Are you the only ones to enjoy what is good? If Father Akanigwo has done good works in your place, he should be allowed to do so in other places. Is he ordained a priest only for you?).

Fr. George Akanigwo's spirit of devotion, dedication, and disinterestedness in material wealth were among the things that made the people love him the most. He never took any percentage share of the Annual Bazaar collections. He let whatever would accrue to him as Parish Priest be used in the building of the church. When his motorcycle got burnt, he did not allow or tax the parishioners to either buy a car or a new motorcycle for him. He told them to use the money for the Church building. God provided a car for him

in April 1975. The N700.00 bill for the car was partly settled by his personal contribution of N300.00 and the Bishop's N400.00. The Beetle-1500 was used by Rev. Fr. Peter Anozie and Very Rev. Fr. Moses Orakwudo, CSSp both of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu. When the Seminary gave Fr. Orakwudo a new car, he asked Fr. George to tell his parishioners to buy the old Beetle-1500. The then Rector of the Seminary, Rt. Rev. Monsignor John Ogbonna, who sympathized with Fr. George in his situation, said: "Fr. George, we use to pity you when we see you riding a motorcycle under heavy rain, that is why we are giving you this car at a very low price of N700.00". Fr. Akanigwo was very grateful to Msgr. John Ogbonna and the Seminary. When leaving Ngwo Parish in August 1975, Fr. George Akanigwo left the vehicle for his successor.

Chapter 4

ST. MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH, AWGU

August 10, 1975-August 10, 1978

Despite the protest of Ngwo parishioners to have Fr. George Akanigwo remain in their parish, in obedience to the Local Ordinary, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye, CSSp, Fr. George relocated to St. Michael's Catholic Parish, Awgu on August 10, 1975 – The Memorial/feast of St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr of the Church of Rome, who died four days after Pope Sixtus and his four companion deacons.

It seems that there are some people destined by God and nature to deal with difficult situations; Fr. George Akanigwo seems to be one of them. His Christian name George may not be a mere coincidence. The Awgu he met was in its natural fighting mood. The name Awgu literally means "fighting". It has been fighting all through, it seems. Because of the situation trust was a rare commodity in the place. This too affected the Church community. It became difficult to find reliable and cooperative parishioners, thus making the injunction of Christ in Matthew 10:11 almost unrealizable: "When you enter a town, find a man who is trustworthy and stay with him". As a man of deep faith and trusting that with God all things are possible, Fr. George braced himself for action in the Lord's vineyard at St. Michael's parish, Awgu with its eleven outstations.

Awgu had many poor innocent Christians who did their best to adhere to God's word, but most of the rich people in the area proved very unreliable. Extortion, injustice, oppression and callousness were common then. So the history of the Church in Awgu has been very checkered and disappointing. The man who brought Catholic faith to the town, the first Catechist of the town, later left the Church and introduced into the town the United Church of Christ (UCC) to compete with the Catholic Church. He masterminded the ejection of the Rev. Sisters from the Convent on May 3, 1978 with the help of the then Anambra State Government under Gov. Atom Kpera, the Police and Awgu youths.



*Fr. George Akanigwo with members of the Parish Council,
St. Michael's Parish, Awgu*

The then Secretary of the Parish Council who was very active and helpful at the time, later left the Church and became a full-fledged member of the "Ufuma church". He

took with him a good number of Catholics from his village to his new church.

The Vice Chairman of the Parish Council with his town's men led the delegation to the Government House to convert the church building into a Secondary School. During Council meetings this man would not raise any objections to any of the Council's decisions. Unknown to the Parish Council, he was a first class traitor. It was an outsider, the then Chairman of State Education Commission and a Catholic from Ngwo, that made this known to Fr. Akanigwo.

The Chairman of the Community Council, incidentally a member of the Parish Council, also helped to mastermind the ejection of the Rev. Sisters. He declared on air that the only condition for peace in the town is the abdication of the Rev. Sisters from the Hospital Management.



Fr. George Akanigwo with Rev. Sisters, Altar Boys, Flower Girls and Catechists on Christ the King Feast, St. Michaels, Awgu

The Communist Russian-trained Medical Doctor who was out to destroy the Catholic Church poisoned the minds of the youth who went on rampage against the Rev. Sisters. The Rev. Sisters were saved by the timely intervention of the God-fearing Secretary of Awgu Local Government, Sir Izuwa, from Abia State. May God bless and continue to bless him and his family.

The forces against the Hospital Management were many. Patent Medicine dealers in the town connived with some nurses in the hospital who sold drugs from the hospital to them, thus causing drug scarcity in the hospital. With time, the combined team of the Patent Medicine dealers and Awgu youths staged a series of demonstrations against the Hospital Management. They did this more than three times in 1976 and 1977.

With these unhappy developments around the Catholic Church and its establishments Fr. George went to his boss, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey M.P. Okoye, CSSp, the then Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu, to report to him the hostile atmosphere directed especially against the Rev. Sisters who were managing the Hospital. He told the Bishop that to retain the Convent and Hospital for the Church was becoming an impossible task. The Bishop's reply was: "If the State Government would pay him back N1.3 million he spent to renovate and reactivate the hospital after the Nigerian-Biafra war, let Awgu people take back the hospital. But the Convent of the Rev. Sisters is the property of the Catholic Church and no one should touch it." The Bishop has spoken. The ever-fighting Fr. George in an effort to see that

the Convent was retained for the Sisters organised two demonstrations in Enugu on December 28, 1977 and January 3, 1978. The aftermath was series of threats on his life.

The first attempt at his life was when a man who dressed like a mad man approached the Father's House at night. He had been hired by some people to kill Fr. George. The man rushed into the parlour at about 9.00pm. Fr George who had gone to bed after a tedious day's work was startled by some commotion and strange noise from the parlour upstairs of the Father's House. When the man rushed upstairs the seminarian, now Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Anulunko, who was then on an Inter-diocesan Apostolic work, came after him though frightened. He managed to force the man downstairs. When Fr. Akanigwo, who was now up, inquired what the noise was all about, the hired assassin shouted that he had come to kill him (Fr. Akanigwo) and swore that by this time tomorrow he (Fr. George) would be a dead man. On hearing this, Fr. George Akanigwo, the Charger, charged downstairs in the direction of the man to get him. When the man heard the footsteps of Fr. George thundering down the staircase he fled into the open field.

Fr. George and the seminarian sought help from a Police Station close by. They were given two armed police officers to arrest the man. When they came back to the mission the man was still there. When Fr. George felt that the police officers were delaying in arresting the man, he pursued the man with uncontrollable alacrity and brought him down with a great sliding stud from behind. In a matter of seconds

he was all over the man with his hands on the man's throat, trying to squeeze the life out of him when the police finally intervened. Casting an angry look at the man who was trying to catch his breath, he let go his hands and handed him over to the police. They hand-cuffed the man and took him to the Police Station. When the case was charged to court sometime later, the man who was now "fully sane" was sternly warned and dismissed by the Magistrate.

The second attempt on Fr. Akanigwo's life was when he went into a village about 6.00pm to negotiate peace between the Church and Rev. Sisters' Community. Having spent two hours talking to the Chairman of the Patent Medicine Dealers without a word from him Fr. Akanigwo decided to leave the village via another route unknown to him that a group of hired assassins had been planted on the route through which he came. The group was armed with buckets of fuel and lighters with which they intended to set him and his car ablaze. Like the Magi and as God would have it, he got home safely through another pathway.

The last attempt on his life was when four armed men sent him a message that they were out to liquidate him. Rt. Rev. Msgr. Peter Meze Idigo, Rev. Fr. Dr. Stan Anih and Rev. Sr. Helen Odukwe MSHR advised Fr. George not to sleep in the Father's House that night. But he asked them that if he left the house that night where would he sleep the next day and the days after? His prayer was that there would be no dot of sin in his heart when God would call him. After consulting the Lord in the Chapel, he went to bed and slept calmly like a very tired traveler. In the morning he was told by Mr. S.

Agboko that four armed men came to the house and went back because none of them was courageous enough to force the door open. They argued that whoever would open the door would also bear the responsibility of what followed next. The Lord put confusion in their heads and minds (Cf. Gen. 11:9) and they left without achieving their purpose.

Despite these Divine manifestations, the word of God seemed not to permeate the hearts of those planning evil for Fr. Akanigwo and the Catholic Church in Awgu. For them, the word of God fell on the rock and among thorns. Under this hostile climate of turmoil and misunderstanding it was difficult to organise a Church Building Committee. Against all odds Fr. Akanigwo started First Sunday Second Collection, that is, a monthly collection for the erection of a Church building. The collection ranged between N800.00 and N1000.00 monthly. On one occasion in 1978, N900.00 was raised. The intension was to make it N1000.00 before taking it to the bank in Enugu. It was decided that this money be left with the Financial Secretary of the Parish Council for safe keeping until when they are ready for the bank transaction. A week later when the officials of the Parish Council went to collect the money, it was all gone. He had spent it all on pool betting. For the three years he was at Awgu, Fr. George Akanigwo with all his efforts was able to raise only N10,000.00 for the Church building project. This money he handed over to his successor, Fr. Francis Okobo who later became the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, when he got a new posting.

The Challenges of Awgu Joint Hospital

Awgu Joint Hospital was built by the then Awgu Division, now comprising Awgu, Orji River, and Aninri Local Government Areas in the early 1950s. The Catholic Church through Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Shanahan, CSSp, the then Catholic Bishop of Onitsha Diocese, was invited to take over the management of the Hospital. His Lordship accepted the invitation on the condition that there would be a Convent for the Rev. Sisters who would work there. He was allowed to build a bungalow of four rooms, a parlour and a Chapel to accommodate four Holy Rosary Sisters.

The Hospital functioned very well until the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafra civil war in 1967 when Awgu town was overrun by the Nigerian forces. At the end of the civil war in 1970, the hospital was in a very deplorable state because of neglect and the devastations of the war. The then Catholic Bishop of Enugu, Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye, CSSp, undertook the reconstruction and reactivation of the dilapidated hospital at the cost of more than N1.3 million. The Immaculate Heart Sisters replaced the Holy Rosary Sisters as managers of the Hospital. Everything went on well and smoothly until when the Awgu Patent Medicine Dealers connived with some nurses in the Hospital to misappropriate the drugs bought for the Hospital's use, thus creating drugs scarcity in the hospital. When the Rev. Sisters discovered this and started to probe it, the Patent Medicine Dealers and the youths of Awgu town, who had been instigated by Patent Medicine Dealers, organised a demonstration against the Management of the Hospital. They requested the government of the then East Central

State to take over the management of the Hospital. The Governor of the State then, Lt. Col. Anthony Ochefu, put their request on hold pending on the outcome of adequate investigations by the appropriate authorities.

While investigations were still going on Ochefu was removed from office and replaced by Governor Atom Kpera, and Bishop Godfrey Okoye died on March 17, 1977. With the change in the government and the death of the Catholic Bishop, the Awgu youths resumed demonstrations on a wider scale. There was a move for a peaceful negotiation between the Church and Awgu people. A meeting was convened. Present at the meeting were Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Charles Ohaeri, Fr. Anthony Aso, Fr. George Akanigwo, Rev. Fr. Dr. Stan Anih, Rev. Srs. Veronica Njoku and Mary Thomas, State Commissioner for Health, Nelson Esimai, some other officials of the Ministry of Health, and Chief G.I. Oko. Awgu people boycotted the meeting. The discussion which lasted for over two hours produced no resolutions and conclusions. The next thing was the desecration of the Blessed Sacrament and the Sisters' Convent by the enemies of the Church.

Psalm 74: 4-6 captures the mood and scene of what happened on May 3, 1978 at the Rev. Sisters' Convent at the Awgu Joint Hospital:

The enemy had laid waste the whole of the sanctuary.

Your foes had made uproar in the house of prayer.

They have set-up the emblems high above the entrance of the Sanctuary.

Their axes have battered the wood of its doors.



Rev. Sr. Veronica Njoku, IHM: "The martyr of the Eucharist"

On this day, the government of Atom Kpera, the then Governor of Anambra State, the DPO of Awgu LGA, the Secretary of the then Awgu LGA, and in the company of other collaborators desecrated the Convent Chapel of the Immaculate Heart Sisters Community in the then Awgu Joint Hospital. It was on the eve of the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord. They agents of the above named began to force the Rev. Sisters: Sr. Veronica Njoku, IHM and Sr. Martha Ozugbo, IHM, out of the Convent. When they started dismantling the Tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament inside it, Sr. Veronica Njoku could not stand it. In her attempt to safeguard the Blessed Sacrament, her neck was broken by one Henry Osakwe from the Ministry of Health. Sr. Veronica still wears a protective PoP on her neck to date. Fr. George calls her “The martyr of the Eucharist”.

The other perpetrators threw the Sisters’ belongings out of the house through the windows and doors. Having finished their work of destruction, they sealed the Convent and moved out. The heavy downpour on the day which started around 6.30pm soaked the Sisters and their property to the skin. They were left out in the cold all through the night. Next morning, before 8.00am the then Bishop of Enugu, Most Rev. Dr. Michael Eneja, arrived at the Hospital and saw the Sisters shivering with cold and their belongings outside the gate of the Hospital. He wept. After condoling and encouraging the Sisters, he left for consultations on what next.

As if what had been done to the Sisters was not enough, the Local Government Education Officer and the Headmaster of

Awgu Township School went on to confiscate both the Domestic Centre and the new Primary School built by Bishop Okoye in St. Michael's compound. The Rev. Sisters managing the Domestic Centre and the students were ejected from there and disbanded.

But the poor man called and the Lord heard him. Many people knew the fate of Mr. Offia Nwali who in 1972 desecrated the Rosary High School Chapel Awgu. In 1982, ten years after the desecration, his wife and four children died in a plane crash at Emene Airport, Enugu. The man who led the operation of evicting the Rev. Sisters from the house and threw their belongings out of doors and windows, some years later, threw his own wife out of a window upstairs during a fight. The Medical Doctor who occupied the Hospital Convent building after the Sisters had been evicted, some years later died in a ghastly motor accident. Many of the others who partook or stood by unconcerned when the perpetrators were carrying out their deadly and unholy operation did not escape nemesis.

Some Other Pastoral Challenges

Fr. George Akanigwo's other pastoral challenges in Awgu include the following:

1. Difficult geographic terrain which made mobility very difficult. Some of the outstations of the Parish community had domicile in the swampy and marshy zones of the area making them inaccessible especially during the rainy season. Also accessibility to the hilly and stony places was equally difficult and time consuming as well as energy sapping. These

conditions adversely affected the frequency of contact with and the administration of the Sacraments to the people of God in these locations.

2. The mere geographical spread of the parish boundaries was something else. Some of the outstations are many miles away from the Parish Centre. A distance of 45 miles may take hours to cover because of the nature of the roads and terrain. Some of the roads and bush paths are not even very motorable.

3. The Irish missionary whom Fr. Akanigwo succeeded was very generous and paternalistic to the people. He did virtually everything for the Church Community without it making any contributions. He generated the funds for these free handouts through fund raising projects which he organised during his biannual leaves overseas. So when he was moved to Emene Parish they felt greatly the loss of a very generous benefactor. When Fr. Akanigwo tried to challenge them to be self-reliant and self-sustaining he not only met with a brick wall but also a stiff resistance. Because they have been taught to receive from the Church rather than give to the Church, many of them were disappointed with the black priest who has come to ask them to make contributions to the Church. For many of them it is no longer the "Church of generosity but a Church of stinginess". The slogan in the town then was: "The

white man has gone, the Igbo man has come; we are finished.”

4. The paternalistic approach of the Irish missionary affected both the Sunday and Offertory collections. Because the white man needed nothing from the parishioners, he did not encourage Sunday collection and offertory gifts. We can only imagine the plight of a poor Nigerian Religious priest who needs both to keep the Church, the body and soul together. During the white man’s regime in the parish, the few food items that came in on Sundays were distributed to the poor on Thursdays. Now the poor Igbo Religious priest has to battle to maintain a delicate balance between feeding himself and the poor with very limited material resources. As a man of deep faith, Fr. George relied on the Lord to provide the resources for the prophet has decreed that on this mountain (parish) the Lord provides. And indeed the Lord did provide both materially and spiritually.

Chapter 5

ST. PATRICK'S CATHOLIC PARISH, OBOLLO-EKE/OBOLLO-AFOR August 10, 1978-August 10, 1979

Fr. George Akanigwo moved into his new parish or parishes on August 10, 1978 after all the hassles at St. Michael's Catholic Parish, Awgu. Obollo-Eke parish which was created in 1948 was the second oldest parish in the present Nsukka diocese. From it Obollo-Afor parish was carved out in the 1960s before the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra war. For long Obollo-Eke has remained one of the poorest parishes in the diocese. Due to the scarcity of priests after the civil war, the two parishes were merged. The Obollo-Eke/Obollo-Afor parish had 17 outstations. When Fr. George Akanigwo moved in there in 1978 he took over from Very Rev. Fr. Isaac Ezeh, CSSp, who had very much endeared himself to the people. Being an elderly and humble priest ordained in 1965 and being an indigene, he was at home with the people's dialect; they loved him and he too loved them.

The Fathers' House in Obollo-Eke was a bungalow with only two rooms, a chapel and a parlour. It was a big contrast when compared with the structures and facilities at the Fathers' House in Obollo-Afor – a storey building of modern architecture. In addition to the responsibility of administering two parishes, Fr. Akanigwo was appointed the Diocesan Chaplain of the Youths. Thinking of how best to serve the people and where to locate his Administrative

headquarters, he chose Obollo-Afor as the most convenient place because of its location along the 9th Mile-Makurdi road and its facilities. Obollo-Eke was not easily accessible because of its remote location. To beef up the facilities at Obollo-Afor, Fr. George without consultation moved the furniture at the Fathers' House in Obollo-Eke to Obollo-Afor. Presumption or mistake number 1! Obollo-Eke people were not amused in their reaction. They felt slighted it not insulted: How could they be administered from Obollo-Afor centre which was carved out from Obollo-Eke, the mother parish? After explaining to them the reason for acting so, he apologized to them and asked them to take their furniture back while he would remain at Obollo-Afor. But their reply to him was: "We want you and the furniture back to Obollo-Eke." They got their wish as Fr. Akanigwo humbly obliged them.

Combining these parish responsibilities was not an easy task; but as a youthful vibrant priest, full of energy, Fr. George was equal to the task. He celebrated four Masses on Sundays: 2 at Obollo-Eke and 2 at Obollo-Afor. For Office days, Obollo-Eke had Tuesdays while Obollo-Afor had Thursdays. His meetings with the youths reflected in his weekly and monthly schedules of duty in and outside his parish boundaries.

Fr. George Akanigwo and the Rainmakers of Ogbodu-Aba

Fr. Akanigwo was barely three weeks in the parish when he had an encounter with the rainmakers of Ogbodu-Aba. It was the culture of the area that every married woman,

whether pagan or Christian, must contribute the sum of 1kobo to the rainmakers for the invocation of their gods to cause rain to fall. The contribution was compulsory for all women married into the town. Fr. George got to know this when he was on first pastoral trek to Ogbodu-Aba. On arrival at the town he noticed that the Catechist's yam-barn had been dismantled and all his yams were being cooked for the women to eat because his wife refused to make the rainmakers' contribution. She has broken a law of the land and the gods of the land must be appeased. Fr. George felt bad about what he saw and wanted justice. How could a community destroy a man's means of livelihood in such a manner? The police and law enforcement officers must hear about this. He decided to drive back to Obollo-Afor, to the police station, more than 13 miles away. As he was on his way a thought came to him: "How could I start my pastoral work in this area with a police case?" On arrival at the police station, instead of making a formal complaint, he decided to consult the police officer on the matter. The officer advised him to meet with three elderly men from the area to iron out the issue.

As Fr. George was driving back to Ogbodu-Aba, at the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he decided to take not only three men but three senior women in addition to look into the matter. He also changed the venue of the meeting from the Catechist's house to the Church premises. At the appointed time for the meeting, none of the invited men showed up. They had all decamped and told the people that there is nothing wrong with paying the one kobo. They argued that it was not a heavy sum of money. For Fr.

George the contribution was “a form of pagan sacrifice” and forcing Christians to pay it is a form of idolatry. He must find a way of liberating Christian women from this forced practice. Since the men who could have helped him to solve the problem decamped, he turned to God in prayer. And God gave him an extempore solution. He inspired Fr. George to communicate to the people that all married women of the town would pay the fee on the proviso that the contributions of the Christian women would be given to the headmaster of the town’s school to make more classroom seats for the pupils; the contributions of the non-Christian women can be given to their juju rainmakers. Since both the non-Christian and Christian children would use the seats, no body raised any objection against the proposal. Fr. Akanigwo thanked God for his intervention.

Fr. George Akanigwo’s Encounter with an AMORC Headmaster

Fr. George Akanigwo and the headmaster of the Central School, Obollo-Eke have had a friendly relationship before now because both of them came to the town almost at the same time. Before both came to town, for light, there was a standing arrangement that connected the Fathers’ house to School’s generator. In preparation for the annual celebration of the School’s feast day, March 17th (Feast of St. Patrick), the headmaster came to Fr. George to review the activities planned for the day and other related matters. The scheduled activities would include film show on the eve of the feast, Solemn Mass and Inter-House sports, etc on the main day. A good number of dignitaries were invited.

Fr. George Akanigwo knew his friend is a member of the AMORC because he made bold to display the emblems of the organisation on the windshields of his car. Fr. Akanigwo also knew that this man had two wives: one at Obollo and the other in his home town – Awgu. The lawful wife was barren. Fr. George was not very comfortable with the situation; he needed more time to study the situation before acting. During the Eucharistic celebration on March 17th, the Feast of St. Patrick, Patron Saint of the School and the Parish, the man strayed dangerously into Fr. George's area of competence and jurisdiction. During the homily, as was the custom then, the Catechist or his assistants or the Church wardens would count those who would receive Holy Communion. As Fr. George was preaching on the Life and Faith of St. Patrick and the seminarian on Apostolic Work was enumerating those for Communion, he noticed the AMORC man raise up his hand to be counted. Fr. George thought within himself: "What? What is this man up to?" Fr. George immediately changed the topic of his homily to "Receiving Holy Communion Unworthily". He made sure that everyone heard him loud and clear.

In spite of what Fr. George said during the homily, to his greatest surprise, this man was the first to show up at the Altar rails for Communion, having walked down the aisles of the church with his noisy shoes. Fr. George had before him one of the toughest dilemmas of his life. He looked up and looked down and then looked in the direction of the man. Then he faced Jesus on the paten and asked: "Lord what am I to do in this matter? If I give 'You' to this man, it would

imply that I respect him more than You; but I respect You more than him and all the other onlookers.” Fr. George had his mind made up and prayed that his courage and faith would not fail him in what he was about to do. He allowed the altar rail to be filled with people before going down to distribute Holy Communion. When he came to the man as he was distributing Communion, the Holy Spirit filled him with courage to say to the man, “Please I will not give you Holy Communion today” and quietly went to the next person. The man left the altar rail boiling inside and hardly waiting for the Mass to be over before leaving the church.

The man went away to plan his revenge. His first reaction was to disconnect the power line that supplied light to the Fathers’ house from the School. The Catholic teachers in the School led a delegation to his house demanding an explanation for the disconnection of power supply to the Fathers’ house. In spite of the delegation, he did not rescind his decision or action. Rather he went to his AMORC friends in the Ministry of Education, Enugu to have the Catholic teacher who led the delegation to his house transferred out of Obollo to Abakaliki. The aggrieved teacher complained to Fr. Akanigwo who advised him not to use any foul or unchristian means to seek a redress. The victimized teacher went to Enugu also to notify his own people in the Ministry that a man from Awgu area had decided to torture him unjustly. Before we knew it had become a case between Awgu people and Nsukka people in government/ministry. In a matter of days the transfer was annulled and the Catholic teacher stayed put in Obollo.

When the Chief of the town noticed what was happening he first went to the man for explanation. He gave the Chief a flimsy excuse. The Chief then came to Fr. Akanigwo to hear his own side of the story. Fr. George sent him back to the man with a warning that “If he didn’t take his time he (Fr. George) would expose him publicly”. Within six months both Fr. George Akanigwo and his AMORC “friend” were transferred out of the area either by design or Divine intervention or both.

Fr. George Akanigwo was in Obollo-Eke/Obollo-Afor for only a year. Although the only physical structures he managed to renovate or build were the Corpers’ house at Obollo-Eke which he renovated and converted into a Convent and the Boys’ quarters at Obollo-Afor which he built, his name is still a household name in the parish to date. He left there for Aguleri Parish on August 10th, 1979.



Fr. Akanigwo’s Sendoff picture at Obollo-Afor in 1979

Chapter 6

ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PARISH, AGULERI

August 10, 1979-November 26, 1979

Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp moved into St. Joseph's parish, Aguleri, Onitsha Archdiocese in Anambra State in late September 1979. The parish was next to Holy Trinity Cathedral, Onitsha and St. Mary's Parish, Inland Town as the oldest parish in the Archdiocese. St. Joseph's Catholic Parish, Aguleri is the home parish/town of the only West African beatified Servant of God Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi. Fr. George had no difficulty settling in on arrival because his predecessor, Very Rev. Msgr. Boniface Asuzu, his townsman and classmate, got on very well with the people.

The very week Fr. George was preparing to move into his new parish, his mother, late Madam Monica Akanigwo, had a fatal motorcycle accident on August 27, 1979. She was rushed to and admitted at Our Lady of Lourdes' Hospital, Ihiala. This incident delayed Fr. George's moving into his new parish until late September of the same year.

The parishioners, especially the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) took special care of his mother. They not only visited her in droves; in addition they lavished her with gifts both in cash and kind. They offered prayers and

Masses for her quick recovery. Fr. George's parish duty was interrupted by his constant taking his mother to the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Enugu.

The town parish organised a reception for him on the last Sunday of October 1979. Another reception involving all the outstations and entire parish was scheduled for 1st Sunday in December 1979. On Monday preceding that Sunday, Fr. Akanigwo was told by his then Religious Superior, Very Rev. Fr. Moses Orakwudo, CSSp, to leave Aguleri for St. Anthony's Isienu in Nsukka diocese. He had little or nothing to hand over to Fr. Michael Ojobor, CSSp, who was appointed to replace him.

When the parishioners from the outstations came to welcome him at Aguleri Centre they were surprised to hear that Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp, was already gone. "Soldier come, soldier go!" The work of God must continue.

Chapter 7

ST. ANTHONY'S CATHOLIC PARISH, ISIENU-NSUKKA

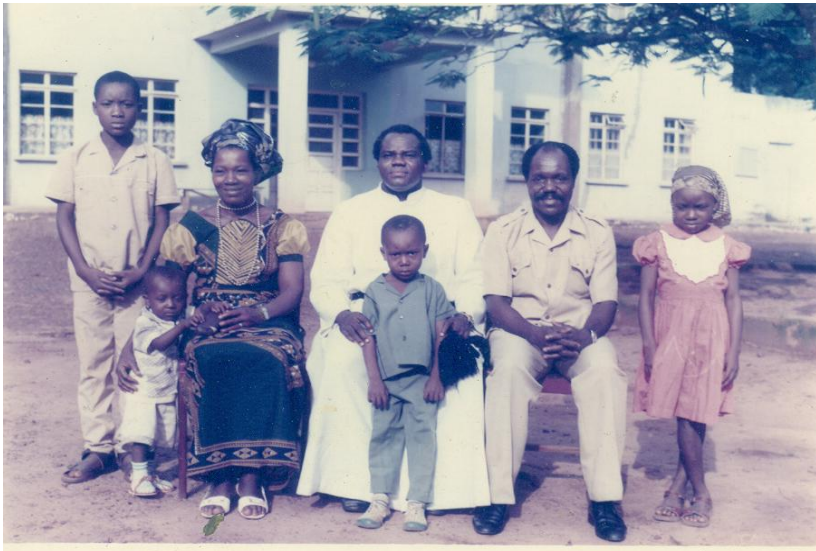
November 26, 1979-August 10, 1986

Fr. George Akanigwo arrived at Isieniu in the last week of November 1979. The parish priest he replaced, Rev. Fr. Tobias Eneremadu, CSSp, had to leave the parish before his arrival because of further studies in the United States of America. In his absence, the parish was looked after by Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Luke Mbefo, CSSp, the Rector of the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isieniu.

At the time of his arrival, Isieniu parish had 25 stations. This was by far the largest parish he has managed. St. Mary's parish Ngwo had 2, St. Michael's Awgu 11 and St. Patrick's Obollo-Eke/Obollo-Afor 17 stations. He had to appeal to the Lord of the Harvest to send more labourers into his vineyard. The first fellow labourers in the Lord's vineyard at Isieniu parish were the priests at the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isieniu. They helped mostly with Sunday Masses, Christmas and Easter Confessions.

On Sundays, Fr. George celebrated four Masses and the priests from the Seminary celebrated more Masses for the people in such a way that most of the 25 stations of the parish were well served on Sundays as far as the Sunday Liturgies were concerned. The major stations were St. Jacob's Orba, St. Mary's Ehalumona, St. Charles' Ehandiagu,

Holy Family Imilike-Enu, and All Saints Ezimo. Places like Ehandiagu and Ezimo were not easily accessible because of remoteness and bad roads. Fr. Akanigwo had his pastoral treks on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The treks involved Confessions, Infant Baptisms and Holy Masses.



Fr. George Akanigwo with his Catechist, Mr. Ononyima and his family

Pastoral Challenges

It seems that wherever Fr. George Akanigwo was posted to work, pastoral problems and challenges stared him in the face. St. Anthony's Isienu was no exception. Rather here they came in droves. Fr. George had a number of serious encounters with the Akatakpa masquerade groups.

The first problem he encountered was with the Akatakpa masquerades. According to him, "these agents of the devil took it as their annual event to harass the female members of the Church by restricting their movement." The blocking

of the roads and the restriction of movement, especially of the women, affected drastically the attendance at Masses and other Church activities during these annual masquerade celebrations. To address this situation, Fr. George called a meeting of the Chiefs of Orba, Ehalumona, Ehandiagu, Imilike-Enu, and Ezimo towns and communities. He agreed with them that their youths would display their masquerades from Monday to Saturday, leaving Sunday free so that people may worship God as instructed in the Third Commandment of God. The Chiefs all signed the Agreement and went home to implement it. Fr. George further warned that if he saw any Akatakpa on Sundays in any of these towns, he would react. Copies of the signed Agreement were sent to the DPOs at Obollo-Afor and Nsukka for information, and necessary action, if need be.

Unfortunately, some of the youths disregarded the terms of the Agreement and took laws into their own hands. One day in August 1980, on his way back from Nando after preaching at the First Mass of Rev. Fr. Augustine Obi, CSSp, around 2.00pm, Fr. Akanigwo saw an Akatakpa masquerade at a crossroad near Chief Abangwu's palace. He stopped his car and came out. As soon as the Akatakpa saw him, it took to its heels. Not seeing properly, it fell into a gutter and that made it an easy catch for Fr. George who unmasked it. The mask was taken to the Fathers' house at Isienu. The news spread like wildfire and there was uproar in town that Fr. Akanigwo had committed an abomination by unmasking the masquerade. This act of abomination must be expiated. The gods/spirits of the land must be appeased. Something must

be done and done quickly before the spirits/gods visit them with vengeance for inaction.



Fr George Akanigwo with mother, child and sponsors after an Infant Baptism

A planned chain of reprisal actions by the devotees of the Akatakpa masquerade included burning down the Fathers' house, setting Fr. George's car ablaze, and blocking the road to the church on Sundays to prevent people from going to church. But the elderly Christians of Ehalumona, especially the CMO, were strongly on Fr. George's side. Also on his side were all the Chiefs who signed the Agreement. On Sundays, they called in the police to keep peace so that the people could attend Mass freely. With the presence of the police there was a temporary truce, but all was not calm on the Western Front.

Encounter with Orba Akatakpa Masquerade Group

The Orba Akatakpa Masquerade group seemed more heartless, devilish and determined than all the other groups. The members of this group saw Fr. Akanigwo as their arch-enemy and an obstacle that must be removed or dislodged at the least. His missionary or pastoral approach is a direct attack on their “kingdom”. This is unacceptable. He must be stopped. The battle ground would shift to Fr. Akanigwo’s mission places! Phase one of their master plan was their avowal to disrupt the Christ the King Eucharistic Procession in 1980.

It was on the last Sunday of November, 1980; Fr. George had arranged to have only one central Mass for all the parishioners at the new site of the proposed Orba parish. The Mass was scheduled to start at 6.30am. The Eucharistic Procession would start from there to the mother parish after the Mass. When Fr. George heard that the masquerades would come out that day to molest anyone who dared to go to church, he sent four respected Chiefs to Obollo-Afor to ask for police protection. The DPO was a bit reluctant to send in his men, for reasons best known to him. When Fr. Akanigwo learnt of this development on Saturday evening, he prepared himself for war and for the worst. He made his “last” Confession to Very Rev. Fr. Simeon Ugwu. He told him that if he should carry the Lord and the masquerades killed him, the Lord would not condemn him. Very Rev. Fr. Simeon Ugwu absolved and encouraged him. Then Fr. George boldly told the people, “We must march ahead, let them kill us”. The DPO was specially warned that

the men who came to him for police protection were very influential people. His continued refusal to send in his men might lead to bloodshed, which could cost him his job. It was at this point that he eventually sent in two police officers at about 9.00am to maintain peace and order. The Eucharistic Procession of Christ the King took place hitch-free. There were no ugly incidents. The people danced peacefully and sang joyously that Jesus has conquered the devil. Another life-threatening and volatile situation has been averted. Thanks to God.

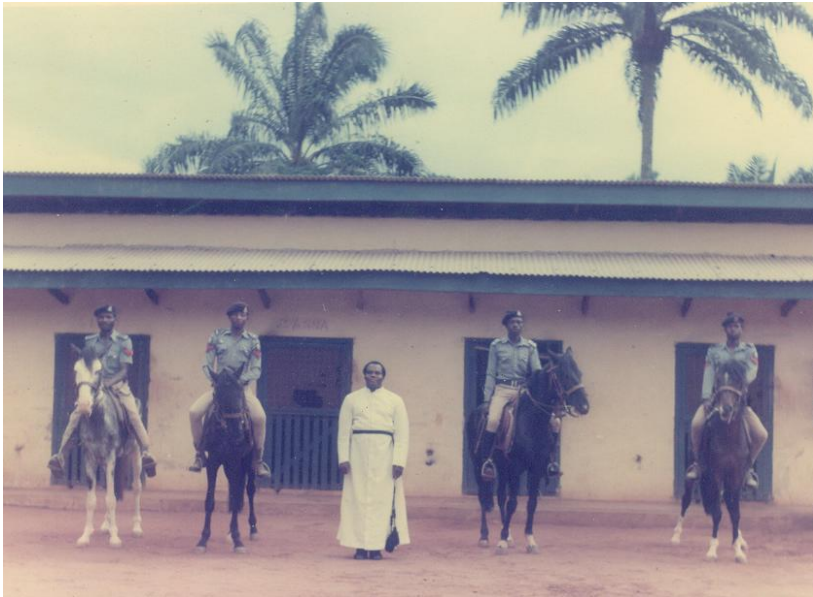
The diehards of the Orba Akatakpa masquerade continued their evil machinations against the Church and Fr. Akanigwo. On the same Feast of Christ the King in 1983, there was another plan to disrupt the celebration. This time the Mounted Troops saved the situation. Very early on that day, about 6.15am, Fr. George was giving a lift to the Flower Girls to Orba Junction, there were the Akatakpa masquerades blocking the road. Before then he had told the leader of the Mounted Troops, a Moslem, to be ready in case of any eventuality. And to Fr. George's surprise he came out to help. As soon as Fr. George alerted him that Akatakpa masquerades blocked the way to the church, he mobilized his men. He assigned two horse-mounted soldiers to Fr. George. They came to Orba Junction and arrested and detained the masquerades. In addition, they patrolled round the villages to reassure the people of their safety and freedom of movement. The people then came out en masse and sang that "*Jesus emeriela Ekwensu ozo*" (Jesus has conquered the devil again).



Fr. George Akanigwo carrying the Blessed Sacrament in a Procession on the Feast of Christ the King, surrounded by the Altar Knights

The last foiled attempt of this group to cause commotion during a Church celebration was in December 1984. This was to take place during Consecration at the Christmas Midnight Mass. A number of these boys had planned this to create a situation that might provide cover for them, in the dark, to rape the girls and/or cause other bodily harm on the worshippers. When Fr. George got wind of this, he went as early as 5.30am to alert the Mounted Troops' Officer of the looming danger. Part of the reason for this evil plan was the stiff resistance and refusal of the Mary League Girls Association to the sexual demands of the boys. Since the Akatakpa has failed, they decided to use this method to harass and possibly rape the women to submission.

The Mounted Troops' Officer detailed some plain-clothes soldiers (in mufti) to monitor the situation. When Fr. George arrived at the venue of the Mass at 11.45pm, the whole place was filled with true worshippers and "the devils". Many of the boys were drinking native gin and smoking, God knows what! The odour from it filled the whole place. Noticing the presence of the Mounted Troops, Fr. George was reassured. As soon as he entered the arena those who were drinking and smoking started shouting and calling him names like "Akanigwo gwo gwo". The soldiers went into action immediately. They arrested about 15 of them and the rest took to their heels. The rest of the night was quiet. The Christmas Feast was celebrated peacefully and with joy for the men and women of goodwill. *Laus Deo sit semper!*



Fr. George Akanigwo with the Mounted Troops stationed at Orba

Church Building Projects in Isieniu Parish

Many of the outstations of Isieniu parish had no permanent structures by way of church buildings for worship. Fr. George had the challenge to mobilize the people to start building their station churches. One of the remotest and newest outstations, Ishiulo, started a small church building and was able to finish it before Easter of 1983. Being a new outstation and not having a name, the Bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Michael Eneja allowed the new Church Community to be named St. George's Catholic Church, Ishiulo after Fr. George Akanigwo's patron saint. Other church buildings that commenced almost at the same time were St. Mary's Church, Ehalumona, St. Charles' Ehandiagu, and Holy Family's Church, Imilike-Enu.

At St. Jacob's Orba, the space in the School-church building was no longer large enough to accommodate all the people who came to Masses. A good number of them stayed outside the building during Mass for want of space inside the building. There was an urgent and great need for a more spacious building to house the worshippers. The search for the land and site for the new church building commenced. Fr. George was shown a dumping ground beside the Oye Orba market. The site was half a kilometre away from the existing school-church building. Fr. George wasted no time in mobilizing the parishioners to clear the dump of many years of accumulated rubbish and filth. Before you knew it a church building was in progress. It was not just a church building but the biggest/largest church in the diocese apart from the Cathedral. The construction of

this massive church is the work of God. God touched the hearts of some people of goodwill to contribute generously in cash and kind and time towards the erection of this magnificent edifice for worship. Among such persons were Sir Prof. Julius Onah, KSJ; Hon. Emmanuel Ezeh; Chief Gabriel Onah; Candidus Agbo and Festus Asogwa. They helped to organise fund raising activities for the church building and the people responded very generously. Within a short time the perimeter fencing was completed; thus securing the land for the church. The church building was roofed in record time and the Easter ceremonies of 1985 were celebrated inside it.

On account of its size and centrality, St. Jacob's Church, Orba is now the designated church and venue for Obollo-Afor Denary Chrism Mass activities. It is hard to believe that a refuse dump site has been turned into a massive church. It is really the Lord's doing. May his name continue to be praised and glorified both now and forever. Amen.

While these physical and infrastructural developments were going on in Isienu parish another transfer was in the offing for Fr. George Akanigwo. In June 1986, the transfer letter to Our Lady of Fatima, Woliwo in Onitsha Archdiocese was delivered to him. Once more, Fr. George has made his mark and was ready to move on to other lands and territory to do new battles and wars in defence of the Catholic Church. In Isienu parish, if all were to forget Fr. Akanigwo, the Akatakpa masquerade groups of Orba town and environs will never forget "Fr. Akanigwo gwo gwo". I guess he still has the Akatakpa mask which he "captured" near Chief

Abangwu's palace in August 1980 as a memorabilia. He may bequeath it to the Spiritan Missionary Archive of Antiquity sometime to come.



What a way to celebrate the victory over Akatakpa Masquerades on Christmas Day! Fr. George Akanigwo mounted on a horse like his Patron Saint, St. George

Chapter 8

OUR LADY OF FATIMA CATHOLIC PARISH, WOLIWO-ONITSHA

June 8, 1986-January 13, 1997

Fr. George Akanigwo reported for duty at Our Lady of Fatima parish, Woliwo on June 8, 1986. After so many running battles and skirmishes with the Akatakpa masquerades of Isieniu and environs, Fr. George needed a place of respite, Woliwo, Onitsha where the masquerades are respected and respectful royal institutions unlike the Akatakpa.



Fr. George Akanigwo with His Grace Most Rev Dr Stephen Ezeanya and Fr. Boniface Ochionu, CSSp

The return of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers as pastoral agents in Onitsha town is the handwork of His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Stephen N Ezeanya. Immediately he was appointed and consecrated the Archbishop of Onitsha in 1985, he invited the Holy Ghost Fathers through the then Provincial Superior, Very Rev. Fr. James C Okoye, CSSp., to administer a parish in the Onitsha Urban. Our Lady of Fatima, Woliwo, a newly carved out parish from Christ the King parish, Onitsha, was handed over to the Holy Ghost Fathers. Fr. George Akanigwo and Fr. Boniface Ochionu, CSSp were appointed to man the parish. Before they moved in on June 8, 1986, Fr. Benjamin Ikegwuonu and Fr. David Okenyi were deputizing for them from 3-3 Junction, the Provincial House. Both were members of the Provincial Administration. Fr. Ikegwuonu was the Provincial Bursar while Fr. Okenyi was the Provincial Secretary.

Initial Challenges at Woliwo

As at the time of their moving in, the parish had an uncompleted church building: a church building without window shutters and partial door fittings; a Fathers' house which was originally a family flat sold to the Church by Chief Hyacinth Muoneke of Isseke-Okija. Because of the nature of the terrain around the Church compound, the whole place including the church building was always flooded and water-logged, at times ankle-deep, after each heavy rain. The first challenge to overcome was how to check the dangerous flooding. The whole compound was German-floored and proper drainage system built. The manpower was supplied by the Catholic Boys Organisation (CBO) of

Woliwo under the direction and supervision of two hired masons. The church building which was windowless and partially “doorless” had to be fixed. So arrangements were made to have them fixed and in no time, the doors and windows were fixed. With the windows and doors in place, the Church was painted.



Fr. George Akanigwo sharing a thought with His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Ezeanya, the then Archbishop of Onitsha, during a Pastoral Visit to Woliwo

Privacy was another big challenge because people crisscrossed and transversed the Church premises at will. Some measure of privacy and protection became very necessary. Hence, the parish compound walling project was initiated. It did not take long before the compound was fenced round and strong iron gates installed. The parish hall was also built during this era. The following rendered invaluable help: Sir Fidelis Onochie, Sir E. Uyammadu and Sir D. C. Anyadobaru. Sir E. Uyammadu supervised the construction of the hall building free of charge. Sir Fidelis Onochie undertook the buying of cement from Nkalagu.

Some other Achievements of Fr. George Akanigwo at Woliwo

The people of Our Lady of Fatima parish will ever remain thankful to God for giving them Gr. G.O. Akanigwo as the Fr. Lutz of their time. He touched every soul and cured their spiritual sickness. He single-handedly stopped the long-standing publication and circulation of an obscene magazine *The Onitsha Weekend Newspaper* not long after he took residence in Onitsha in 1987. He warned the publisher, quoting from Ezekiel 3:16-21, that he and the family would suffer for all the sins committed by the readers of that paper. His warning came on Sunday and by the next weekend the publication was discontinued. He spoke and preached the Word of God with authority and deep faith. And many who listened to him were touched, converted and changed.



Fr. George Akanigwo with His Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze, His Grace Most Rev Dr Stephen Ezeanya and His Lordship Most Rev Dr Emmanuel Otteh during the Eucharistic Congress, Onitsha, 1992

Fr. George had other important appointments in addition to his pastoral assignments and engagements. He was appointed by Archbishop Stephen Ezeanya the Archdiocesan Promoter, National Eucharistic Congress of 1992; to Onitsha Archdiocesan Marian Year Committee, 1987; Vicar for the Religious, Onitsha Archdiocese, 1990-1996; and Chaplain Catholic Teachers, Onitsha Archdiocese.

Following his motto: “I will make you the light of the world” (Is 49:6) “that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth” and “that your priests be clothed with holiness and that the faithful may shout for joy”, Fr. Akanigwo’s target as a priest is to save souls and erect structures (Wis. 9:7-9). Because of these objectives his modus operandi has been

Confession every day after Mass, Visitation of the Sick almost every week, Holy Hour every First Sunday of the month and every Thursday. For him, a day in the life of a priest or Religious without Holy Hour is a lost one. It is an indispensable opportunity to consult with the Lord for an effective pastoral work, even at the zenith of crises.



Marian Year Celebrations 1987-1988, Onitsha; Fr. George Akanigwo was the Archdiocesan Coordinator

Fr. George Akanigwo, as we say in this part of the world, nearly “planted bottle” at Our Lady of Fatima, Woliwo. For ten good years he “reigned supreme” in this parish. He almost qualified for what the Church referred to in those days as “Immovable Parish Priests”.



Fr. George with a couple and sponsors after an Infant Baptism



Fr. George Akanigwo surrounded by sympathizers at the mother's funeral on January 13, 1993

Chapter 9

ST. PETER'S CATHOLIC PARISH, OKO

January 14, 1997-July 2007

Fr. George Akanigwo and Fr. Casimir Nwachukwu, CSSp arrived at Oko on January 14, 1997. Fr. Casimir Nwachukwu was appointed Assistant Parish Priest to Fr. Akanigwo who was transferred from Woliwo in Onitsha Archdiocese to Oko in Awka Diocese. At the time of their arrival, Oko had a very strong Anglican Community and presence. The very imposing St. John's Anglican Church, Oko says it all. It is a landmark you cannot miss. Fr. George noticed this before he ever came to Oko as the Parish Priest when on September 30, 1996 he travelled to Umunze via Oko to bury one of his Catechists who served at Our Lady of Fatima, Woliwo. In Fr. Akanigwo's words: "When I saw St. John's Anglican Church Oko, I really admired it but when I saw the sad condition of St. Peter's Catholic Church Oko I sighed. It was a sharp contrast." He didn't know that he would be there in a matter of months to build up St. Peter's dilapidated church building and shepherd its Catholic flock.

Challenges of Reconstruction

When Frs. George and Casimir moved into St. Peter's they had a very welcoming, accommodating and well-built presbytery or Fathers' House but the church building was under construction and in need of major repairs. The first

challenge was to provide burglary proof for the church. The Mary League Girls presented to Fr. Akanigwo the sum of N25,000.00 as their contribution for the construction of windows burglary proof which was estimated to cost N30,000.00. Fr. George gave a denotation of N5,000.00 which took care of the shortfall.



Fr. George Akanigwo discussing a pastoral issue with the then Auxiliary Bishop of Awka, Most Rev Dr Solomon Amatu

But the church building needed more repairs. The roof leaked badly leading to the flooding of the church after every heavy rain. It had been re-roofed twice, Fr. George was told, but the problem continued. A real lasting solution must be found. After consultation, it was decided that the best fix for the leaky roof was to use long span aluminum roofing sheet. After tenders were invited for the reroofing of the church with the long span sheets, the contract was

awarded to an Oko man at the cost of N2.7 million. Fr. George was not comfortable with the deal but he let go at the insistence of the Parish Council. Fr. George's fears were proved right. The man did not deliver as promised; rather he abandoned the work after nine months behind schedule and with full payment of N2.7 million. The Church community having been duped by one of its town's people was down-spirited. But the work of God and the building must go on. Other alternatives must be found and other possibilities explored by one and all.

Fr. George decided to go to Woliwo, his former parish, to appeal for funds. The people at Woliwo were surprised to see Fr. Akanigwo do this; something he had never done before. In their own words: "Fr. Akanigwo does not beg; this must be a serious case that forced him to beg." They responded generously and at the end of the exercise they handed him a sum of N300,000.00. Coming back to Oko, he handed the money to the Parish Council. Another contractor in the person of Sir Raymond Ekwenem was invited to complete the roofing at the cost of N300,000.00. And he successfully did.

Having roofed the church successfully, the next target was to build the gallery. A tender charged N13,000.00 for the job but another local young man offered to do the work free of charge on the proviso that the Church would supply the materials on request. The community thought that it was fair enough and agreed to his terms. The supplies were made and he did an excellent job and in record time. It was not long before it was discovered that the young man

duped the Church of up to N52,000.00. He was using some of the church materials to work for other people at a cost. Fr. George was really disappointed because the young man was regular at Morning Masses then. In addition, when he was doing the job, the Church took care of his feeding. When he finished the job, the Church showed further appreciation by giving him a sum of N5,000.00 and Fr. George took him to the Chapel and prayed for him, asking God to bless him for his “generosity”. “Imagine that! What a hypocrite!” Fr. George pondered.

Take it or leave it, there are more like him in and around the Church. There are many who think that the Church is very wealthy and that they can grab as much as they can by whatever means without diminishing its wealth. We had a worker in one of our Formation Houses who used to exhort the seminarians thus: *“Riwenu umum, ego si Rome abia. Uka bu orimini, odighi ata-ata”* (Eat as much as you want, my children. The money comes from Rome. The Church is an ocean; it never dries). To change this mindset requires solid and consistent catechesis especially on the formation of good/right conscience. Cheating is cheating and stealing is stealing no matter from whom and in what circumstances. Period! Situation ethics apart! Therefore, one of the pastoral challenges and obligations of any pastoral agent in the religious and moral education of the people is right character and conscience formation. Here too, example if the best teacher. It is not really what you say or teach, rather what you do that matters the most.

Fr. George had yet another case of deception to narrate. This time a former Catechist of the parish was involved. The parish needed land for the construction of a church building at a new outstation at Ezioko. The former Catechist (name withheld) offered to help in procuring the land and requested for N100,000.00. Fr. George would not approve such an amount for the land when the parish was looking for funds to complete the work at the parish centre. After the bazaar of 1988, the Parish Council persuaded Fr. Akanigwo to approve N50,000.00 for him. He issued a receipt of payment to the Church. But when the surveyor went in to demarcate the land and set the beacons, he and his men were mal-handled by one Ikeaka family from Ezioko for trespassing. A delegation of respected members of the Church and community met with the Ikeaka family. It was discovered that the former Catechist resold half of the land originally bought for the Church and with the Church money to the Ikeaka family. That was not all; as the discussions were going on a woman came crying and abusing that part of her husband's land was being forcefully taken.

From all indications it seemed that the Church at that time could lay claims to only a quarter of the land it originally paid for. It is said, once beaten, twice shy. Fr. George Akanigwo and his parishioners have been beaten more than twice in Oko by dupes. They had every reason to be ashamed, angry and disappointed. They were forced to demand for an immediate refund of the money from the former Catechist. This was in 1998. Until Fr. Akanigwo left Oko in July 2007, not a kobo of the N50,000.00 was refunded.

Other Church projects that faced Fr. George were the flooring of the church with terrazzo, the completion of the Sanctuary, the furnishing of Chapel of Adoration and the construction of the Grotto. The terrazzo was done courtesy of Chief Izuegbunam, an Oko man based in Aba. The Oko Catholic community appreciated his generosity. The various works in the Sanctuary were successfully completed through the contributions of the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) and Sir & Lady Raymond Ekwenem. Also Sir & Lady Raymond Ekwenem and family donated the N240,000.00 metal Stations of the Cross to the Church. A non-Catholic man from Oko popularly known as “Overdose” painted the Church and the wall of the compound. While the Oko Catholic community thanked them here on earth, Fr. Akanigwo reassured them that their reward will be greater in Heaven.

The Chapel of Adoration which was built by Rev. Fr. Ignatius Ukoh in 1996 was later ornamented by Mr. Ogonna Okoli with the best architectural work befitting such a place of worship. The surrounding grounds of the Chapel were German-floored. In August 2005, as part of their August Meeting Project, the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) painted the Fathers’ House. The Mary League Girls took up the construction of the Grotto. Before Fr. George left Oko in July 2007, St. Peter’s Catholic Church, Oko had become one of the most beautiful churches in Awka Diocese. On one of his visits to Oko, Very Rev. Fr. Augustine Onyeneke, CSSp, the Provincial Superior of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers, Province of Nigeria, could not but comment on the look of the church finishing: “It really looks like those

found in Europe.” Fr. George acknowledged the complement by quoting Psalm 84:1, “How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of Hosts” and added quickly another quotation from the Bible: “Not to us O Lord but to your Name give the glory.”

Fr. George may not know it. One of the competences that qualified him for appointment to St. Peter’s Oko and other missions like it is his ability to quote freely and *ad rem* from the Scriptures or the Bible. With a very strong Anglican presence, the Catholic apostolate in Oko required a bible-carrying and quoting priest as well as one very grounded in Catholic doctrine. Fr. Akanigwo not only quoted the Scriptures in English, he did so in Latin, Hebrew and Greek. He had a voice that could fill a big church without a public address system.

He bade goodbye to St. Peter’s Catholic Church, Oko in July 2007 after 10½ years; the longest time he had ever stayed in a parish.

Chapter 10

ST. MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH, EZINIFITE-NNEWI

August, 2007-December 2010

When Fr. George Akanigwo came to St. Michael's Ezinifite, Nnewi in August 2007, he was already 67 years old and 34 years in the ministry. He is by then so set in his ways. It is either you take him or leave him. At 67, in modern GSM vocabulary, he has almost entered "Voice mail". He is now on diet and has slowed down considerably in many ways, but not over and out yet.

Like Oko, Ezinifite had a very strong Protestant presence and their church is only a stone throw from the Catholic Church. When Fr. George came quoting the Bible left, right and centre and drawing the crowds, and challenging their way of life, the Protestant community felt very threatened. They had never seen the like before. In no time, there were instigations here and there especially among the youths. But Fr. George was equal to the challenge for old soldiers never die that soon.

Inflexibility was one of Fr. George's challenges in Ezinifite. People there have had their own ways of doing things and organising their communities and societies. Fr. George wanted changes but the people, especially the youth and some elders, were stiff in their opposition to those changes. Fr. George was at cross-roads with some members of his

Church community and the locals, mainly as a result of generation gap.



“The Morning After” Fr. G. Akanigwo’s Encounter with Armed Robbers at Ezinifite, Nnewi Diocese

One of the most memorable and bitter experiences of Fr. Akanigwo at St. Michael's Ezinifite was the case of a brutal armed robbery attack of the Fathers' House on the early hours of October 16, 2009. It was about 4.00am when four armed robbers made their way into the Fathers' house through the back door. They surrendered Fr. Akanigwo with their guns and ordered him to lie face-down on the floor. The hoodlums ransacked the presbytery and carted away any valuables they could lay their hands on. On their way out of the house, one of the bandits struck Fr. George on the face with the butt of the gun, causing a bloody and gaping wound. The Fathers' cook was equally badly wounded on the head. The armed robbers made their getaway in a parish Volvo car which was later recovered by the police. When the robbers left, Fr. George and the cook were rushed to Visitation Hospital, Osumenyi for treatment.

Interacting with parishioners and sympathizers, Fr. George used the occasion to preach forgiveness and against revenge and violence, quoting extensively from the Bible. He recalled that he was tempted to fight back, but remembering what Christ said in Matthew 5:39, "But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil", he was restrained. When one of the parishioners enquired what happened to this face, the wound and the blood all-over his soutane, he jokingly replied quoting Zech. 13:6, "I received the wound in the house of my friends" and he added, quoting from Col. 1:24, "I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the Church." A lady who saw how Fr. George was disfigured, cursed the robbers, saying: "They

will all rot in hellfire.” Fr. George cut in and prayed: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). Realizing that it could have been worse, he thanked God for saving him “from the violent attack of the wicked” (Ps 17:9). Pointing to his wound, he said, “In the midst of robbers” (Cf. 2 Cor. 11:26), I found myself “bearing on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17).

It was from here that Fr. George Akanigwo sang his swan song as a parish priest. Barely a year after the armed robbery attack and after 3 years of service at St. Michael’s Ezinifite, he bowed his exit honourably and meritoriously from public and active service in the Lord’s vineyard. In all, he put in 37 good years serving God and neighbour as a devoted and dedicated religious missionary and priest of God.

Rev Fr. George Akanigwo is now taking his hard-earned and well-deserved rest and retirement at the Holy Ghost Haven, Mgbidi in Imo State, a retirement and resting home for the elderly of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers (Spiritans), Province of Nigeria South East. On June 4, 2015, Fr. George will be celebrating his 75th Birthday. We are anxiously looking forward to that but in the meantime I think it is order to say: *Ad multos annos!* in advance.

Chapter 11

FR. GEORGE AKANIGWO'S PRACTICAL WAYS OF LIVING CELIBATE LIFE

The fatherly advice of Venerable Fr. Mary Paul Libermann CSSp., co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on practical ways of living the celibate life, is very helpful. First, he draws our attention to the fact that chastity demands wise and constant discipline. The support and companionship an earthly lover finds in a spouse, the consecrated lover finds in an infinitely higher degree in God Himself. The joy an earthly father finds in his children, the consecrated lover finds in those who are the fruits of his apostolate.

For perfect chastity, Fr. Libermann teaches that to be faithful, we must resist energetically all tendencies even those that are indirectly associated with this concupiscence. We must use all possible means to keep our hearts and bodies pure. As becomes men consecrated to the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, therefore, we must strive to protect and develop in ourselves the virtue of purity and take prudent means to avoid all that might excite or intensify in us sexual appetites or desires.

On the Means of Preserving Chastity, **Mistrust of Self** is one and vital. The first means of protecting chastity proposed by our Venerable Father is a healthy mistrust of self and watchfulness in prayer. Once the fire of concupiscence is

ignited, it can be extinguishing only with difficulty and rarely without some harm being done.

Custody of the Senses is another important means. Fr. Libermann points out that the *chaste man* is suspicious of all inclinations whose object is mere sense-gratification and denies himself those satisfactions which might weaken the tempo of his spiritual life. He excludes from mind and heart, imaginative and actual, all that is merely sentimental, denying himself even apparently innocent acts of tenderness or affection. We must particularly, according to Fr. Libermann, *“be watchful in our dealings with women, especially good and pious ones. The danger signal here is preoccupation of mind and imagination with the person concerned. We must reject all such preoccupation from the outset and refrain from any outward manifestation of the sentiment aroused in us, maintaining a becoming reserve in word and attitude. The confessional itself can be an occasion of such a temptation that we must discourage our penitents from becoming attached to us. We cannot therefore use them as occasions of our gratification or steal their affections from Him.”* We must keep before us the following points:

1. Good, single girls, unaware of the strength of passion in man, may naively think this is an affection to be indulged in without danger.
2. Married women may seek in the friendship of a priest compensation for happiness or affection in their marital state.

3. Frivolous women may see the 'conquest of this man in uniform' as a triumph for their vanity.
4. An evil woman may consider priestly virtue as a challenge and obstacle to be overcome.

What should be our attitude in these circumstances? Internally, we must not allow our heart to be troubled by impure suggestions, but prayerfully and peacefully cling to God and to our ideal. Externally, we must be reserved, respectful and aloof, while at the same time being supernaturally sympathetic, helpful, and understanding. The elements of our armour are total love of God in Himself and in others, prayer, humility, sacrifice, a prudent awareness of danger, generosity in making it remote, and modesty, the safeguard of chastity in the temptations to which our ministry exposes us.

Modesty is yet another powerful in preserving Chastity. The aim of modesty is to moderate all our exterior activities, in a manner that it is serious and recollected, in conversation that is gentle and restrained, in actions that are deliberate and reserved. Modesty is especially necessary in our dealings with the opposite sex. We should omit all conversations with women that are useless, avoiding any suggestion of even the slightest familiarities. Reserve and seriousness should be seasoned with gentleness. Letters should be brief, courteous, but free from expressions of endearment or frivolity suggestive of a purely natural friendship, however innocent. *"Take care, spouse of Jesus*

Christ, to have no familiar relations with anyone but Jesus,” advised Libermann.

Women can instinctively read the heart of a man, whatever his exterior pose. This intuition is a gift of God for the protection of their own virtue but can be misused for their own satisfaction. They will either then wisely withdraw for their own protection or they will entangle us in a too human and perhaps fatal affection.

Mortification is another very necessary tool. Such a program evidently demands the practice of self-discipline and self-denial. The denial of the flesh and legitimate desires is a sacrifice we make for a noble ideal. It is the basic mortification of our chaste calling; we must love somebody, God or creature. A vow of chastity does not produce exemption from temptation of the flesh. “I shall seek in the strong support of God’s loving grace, the help I need to be faithful. Prayer is necessary. But prayer alone is not enough. We must cooperate with the grace thus obtained.” The more socially inclined we are the more watchful we must be in this respect. Priestly or religious virtue requires the avoidance of whatever is sensuous or effeminate in our mode of life. Our attitude should always be virile and disciplined.

The Enclosure is of an indispensable value in the preservation of Chastity. Traditionally, the rule of the cloister has been regarded as a means of freeing religious from worldly attraction on their union with God. In this connection, Fr. Libermann forbids the admission of women to the interior of our communities. Their spiritual direction

should normally be confined to the confessional. Confessors to women religious, chaplains and others should frequent the parlour as little as possible. When they do so, they should avoid long or trivial conversations confining themselves to what is conducive to the spiritual welfare.

Our vocation is to carry God's message and God's grace to the world. The celibate Religious has even greater need; to surround himself with a spiritual cloister, a chaste enclosure where none but God may penetrate. In the world, he may never be of the world: *Homo segregatus sacerdos*.

“Controlled” Affection for Children is very important in our practice of Chastity. Our Venerable Father reminds us of the duty of restraining this so natural attraction and urges us *not to be over affectionate with children*. While such affection of its nature is more pure than others, we cannot indulge it. At the same time we should always treat children with reverent tenderness after the example our Divine Lord, who said: “Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not.”

Loyalty above suspicion is an indispensable tool for preserving Chastity. Father Libermann remarks that it is not enough to take positive means of preserving our purity; we must also prudently avoid whatever might arouse suspicions in others of the genuineness of our virtue. Many outside the Church do not believe it is possible to lead a celibate life. To them it is ‘unnatural.’ They think priests and Religious are pharisaic in this matter and indulge in secret passions, which they deny in public. In consequence, they watch us closely for some sign to confirm this belief.

Chastity is the free renunciation of created love for the love of God, a love which embraces all men, is at the service of all, but is the slave of none. Fidelity to it requires a detachment that refuses all created compensation and a humanity which rejects all human esteem and admiration. Like a beloved spouse, rest always on His Divine Heart, which is a boundless sea of love. Be nourished through that most chaste and pure union with Divine Love. It was the Virgin that brought forth the child. It was that chaste Son who restored and sanctified our wounded nature by wedding it to His own divine nature in the hypostatic union. Jesus and Mary are the models of the priests and religious for the chaste fruitfulness of our apostolate.

A right appreciation of the nobility of sex and its place in the divine plan of creation is in order. As Fr. Libermann says, *A deep compassion for the human frailty of those who abuse it, self-dedication to God in chastity, an intimate love of Christ and His Blessed Mother, frequent prayer and fervent recourse to the sacraments, will be invaluable to the sincere celibacy.*

EXAMPLES OF CELIBATES WHO FOUGHT SUCCESSFULLY AGAINST CHASTITY-RELATED TEMPTATIONS

Here are some examples of celibates and saints who faced successfully difficult temptations against the virtue of Chastity:

Susanna (Cf. Dan.13:1-66). This is the case of a very beautiful woman who feared God but was longed for by two elders in her husband's court. Both were overwhelmed

by their lust, which prevented their eyes from looking up to heaven. When finally caught by these wicked people who were deceived by beauty and whose hearts were perverted by lust, she sighed deeply and said: *I am hemmed in on every side. For if I do this thing it is death for me and if I do not, I shall not escape your hands. I choose not to do it and fall into your hands, rather than to sin in the sight of the Lord.* She then cried out with a loud voice. Susanna was saved by the awareness of God's presence.

St. Rose of Lima is a very good example especially for young people of a chaste life. As a virgin, our Lord revealed His presence to her on numerous occasions which left her for hours in ecstasy of peace and joy, especially when she had successfully overcome diabolical temptations against purity and constancy in faith.

St. Anthony of Egypt lived a hermit's life. He fasted and did without sleep most of the time as a way of life. He tortured his body for over twenty years. The devil assaulted him one night when it took the shape of a woman and imitated her acts to beguile Anthony but the chaste hermit remained victorious by the grace of Christ.

St. Thomas Aquinas the great theologian and philosopher had his own temptations and trials against chastity. Some members of his family, in order to frustrate his vocation to the priesthood, went as far as to hire an impure woman to tempt him. The lady entered Thomas' room naked, but he chased her out of the room with a burning stick. As a reward for his fidelity, God conferred upon him the gift of

perfect chastity, which merited him the title “Angelic Doctor.”

St. Joseph Calasang the founder of the Order of Clerks Regular of the Religious Schools was not spared these temptations. His motto was *Fortitudo in fuga est*. He left the University of Valencia in order to escape the attention of a young woman, who subjected him to a temptation similar to that undergone by his namesake in Genesis 39:1-12. He who fights and runs, lives to fight the next day. He finished up his studies at the University of Alcala.

St. Columba was tempted by certain *lascivae pullae* (shameless and amorous women) who made advances to him. Columba was grievously tempted to yield. But by following the advice of a wise counselor, he not only left his country, he also chose the cloistered rather than secular life.

St. Benedict, although he lived the sequestered life from the world, like the fathers in the desert, he had temptations of the flesh and the devil. The evil spirit brought before his imagination a certain woman whom he had formerly seen, and inflamed his heart with such vehement desire at the memory of her that he had very great difficulty in repressing it. And being almost overcome, he thought of leaving his solitude. Suddenly, however, helped by divine grace, he found the strength he needed. Seeing close by a thick growth of briars and nettles, he stripped off his garment and cast himself into the midst of them. There he rolled until his whole body was lacerated. Thus through those bodily wounds he cured his soul and was never again

troubled in the same way (Cf. Herbert J. Thurston and Donald Attwater, *Butler's Lives of the Saints* Vol.1, p. 652).

St. John of the Cross on one occasion was subject to a barefaced attempt by an unrestrained young woman of considerable attraction. Instead of the burning brand that St. Thomas Aquinas used on a like occasion, John used gentle words to convince her of the error of her way of life. By like means but in other circumstances he got the better of another lady, whose temper was so fierce that she was known as Robert the Devil (Cf. Herbert and Attwater, op. cit. Vol. IV, p. 414).

St. Malchus was told to marry his fellow captive, and he was very alarmed. Not only was he a monk and so had put marriage behind him, but he also knew that the girl was already married in her own country. However, she was not altogether unwilling. But when Malchus threatened he would rather kill himself, the girl declared that she was quite indifferent to him and that she was prepared to live with him under a mere appearance of matrimony and so satisfy their master. This they did, though neither of them found the arrangement completely satisfactory. "I loved the woman as a sister" declared Malchus to St. Jerome, "but I never entirely trusted her as a sister" (Cf. Herbert and Attwater, op. cit. Vol. IV, p.169).

St. Maxentia dedicated herself to God at an early age, and when her father wished to give her in marriage to a pagan chief she fled from home. Taking with her two servants, a man and a woman, she crossed the sea of Gaul and settled at the place on the Oise that is now called Pont-Sainte

Maxence, near Senlis. One day she was surprised by the arrival of a number of horsemen outside her cottage. It was the disappointed suitor, who had tracked her down. He asked her to return with him, but Maxentia refused indignantly. When threats were of no avail, the man, carried away with fury, seized her by the head and cut it off. Her faithful servants suffered a like fate (Cf. Herbert and Attwater, *op. cit.* Vol. IV, p.394).

St. Tysilio, when his elder brother, the prince of Powys died, his widow Haiarnwedd wished to marry Tysilio and make him prince. Tysilio would have none of these, for he had no taste for war and secular pursuits or for marriage. His sister-in-law, who took his refusal as a personal insult, drove him from Meifod. Tysilio took refuge at Builth in Breconshire (Cf. Herbert and Attwater, *op. cit.* Vol. IV, p.297).

Blessed John Salerno had a trying experience with a young woman of undisciplined desires who had given herself up to passion for him. She pretended she was ill, went to bed, and sent for Brother John to hear her confession. The friar went at once, only to discover that his “penitent” wanted to take brazen advantage of their being alone. He rebuked the lady severely and tried to bring her to reason. But when he found her unrelenting, he came away and left her alone (Cf. Herbert and Attwater, *op. cit.* Vol. III, p.295).

A Nigerian Experience - An old priest had his plight before the Nigerian/Biafran War. His only brother died childless and his widow was dead too. The family was dying out. Occasionally he visited home. On one of those visits he wanted to spend the night in his almost abandoned father's

compound. His cousins and other relations welcomed him happily. All hands were on deck to clean the house and prepare his meal, while he visited from house to house, consoling the bereaved in his village. He came back about 10:00 p.m. and after he had his bath and a well- prepared meal as well as a chat with his relations, he went to bed around 11:30p.m. The rest also retired to their homes. There was no electricity and his bed was high enough. He did not know that his good and sympathetic relatives had innocently got a “wife” for him to raise children for his almost phased-out family. Around midnight, like Boaz (Ruth 3), the elderly priest was startled to see a woman who came from under his high bed to join him. He got up from the bed, packed his little travelling suitcase and hurried out of the compound in his car. Since no one was afraid to travel late at night in those days, he headed straight back to his parish.

Many years have elapsed since this even took place. Since then any other time the priest came home to spend the night, he would first flash his torchlight around and especially under the bed before he calmly slept. Long live the elderly celibate.

WISE SAYINGS AND HONEST ADVICE ON CELIBACY

All celibates must always keep fresh and sound memories and knowledge of what true Celibacy is all about. They must cherish these wise sayings and honest advice on how to foster the vows and virtues of true chastity and celibacy.

1) Celibacy is a treasure hidden in the field (Mt. 13:44).

- 2) It is a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:45).
- 3) It is a gift from God (Mt. 19:12; I Cor. 7:7).
- 4) “It needs a daily warfare till our last breath” (Pope Pius XII).
- 5) “It is impossible without prayer” “and genuine Eucharistic Devotion” (Pope John Paul II).
- 6) Its cankerworm is “Dangerous friendship with the opposite sex” (St. Charles Borromeo).
- 7) “It admits no compromises” (Francis Cardinal Arinze).
- 8) “It excludes all lustful touches, kisses and embraces” (St. Thomas Aquinas).
- 9) “A prudent awareness of the danger, and generosity in making it remote” (Ven. Francis Mary Paul Libermann, CSSp).
- 10) “To make themselves eunuchs for the sake of kingdom of heaven” is not in fact merely a free renunciation of marriage and family life, but a charismatic choice of Christ as one’s exclusive Spouse. Through the Vow of Chastity, consecrated persons share in the economy of the Redemption through the free renunciation of the temporal joys of marriage and family life on the other hand, precisely by their ‘having made themselves eunuchs for the sake of Kingdom of heaven,’ they bring into the midst of this passing world the announcement of the future resurrection and of eternal life: life in union with God Himself through the beatific vision and the love which contains in itself and completely pervades all the other loves of the human heart” (John Paul II: *Redemptionis Donum*).
- 11) It is important to reaffirm the beauty and importance of a priestly life lived in total fidelity.

12) Celibacy as a sign expressing total and exclusive devotion to Christ, to the church and to the kingdom of God, remains obligatory in the Latin tradition. Priestly celibacy lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for the society itself (Cf. Benedict XVI, Pope *Sacramentum Caritatis*, February 22, 2007, #24).



Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp celebrating Holy Eucharist

Chapter 12

FR. GEORGE'S LITANY OF THE SAINTS FOR CHASTE LIFE

Lord, have mercy on us	Lord, have mercy on us
Christ, have mercy on us	Christ, have mercy on us
Lord, have mercy on us	Lord graciously hear us
God the Father of Heaven	Have mercy on us
God the Son Redeemer of the world	Have mercy on us
God the Holy Spirit inspirer of chaste thoughts	
Holy Trinity in one God	Have mercy on us
Holy Mary	Pray for us
Holy Mother of God	"
Virgin most pure	"
St. Joseph, most chaste	"
St. Joseph of Egypt	"
St. Boaz	"
St. Anthony of Egypt	"
St. Peter Damian	"
St. Thomas Aquinas	"
St. Francis de Sales	"
St. John of the Cross	"
St. Columba	"
St. Benedict	"
St. Malchus	"
St. John Salerno	"
St, William of Verceli	"
St. Tysilio	"

St. Joseph Calasanz	“
St. George	“
St. Maurice	“
St. Margret of Hungary	“
St. Maxellendis	“
St. Maxentia, Solanzia	“
St. Agnes	“
St. Agatha	“
St. Maria Goretti	“
St. Justina	“
St. Isabel	“
St. Ann	“
St. Jude	“
St. Callistus	“
My holy Guardian Angels	“
Holy Archangel Raphael	“
Holy Archangel Michael	“
Holy Archangel Gabriel	“
All you saints of chaste life	“

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; Graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; Have mercy on us.

Let us pray:

O Lord my God, cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me, (Ps.51:11). Do not give me haughty eyes and remove from me evil desire. Let neither

gluttony, nor lust overcome me; and do not surrender me to a shameless soul (Sir.23:4-6).

Most Holy Mary, Mother of Mercy and Goodness, strength my weakness, so that after a fervent and holy life, I may find my place in heaven (Lk.10:17-20) among your children (Jn.19:25-27). O my God, may I belong to you forever through Christ our Lord, Amen.



Fr. George Akanigwo relaxing with one of his best confreres and friend, His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Vincent Ezeonyia, CSSp, the Catholic Bishop of Aba.

Chapter 13

TESTIMONIES ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF FR. GEORGE AKANIGWO, CSSp

We present here four sample testimonies of the various groups of Christ's faithful who were touched by life and works of Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp. The numerous retreats he preached or facilitated, especially for the Religious men and women, speak volumes in his favour. The sample testimonies presented here include: (a) *A farewell Address* by the Oko Catholic Community, (b) *A Vote of Thanks* by Fourth Year Theologians of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, (c) *Behold! A Typical Priest of God* by Sir Edwin Chuks Ubboh of Our Lady of Fatima, Woliwo-Onitsha, and (d) *The Priest with a Difference!* by Mrs. Lydia A. Udorji of QRC, Onitsha.

(A)

**A FAREWELL ADDRESS PRESENTED TO REV. FR. GEORGE
AKANIGWO, CSSp. ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SEND-FORTH
AT ST. PETER'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, OKO ON 2ND MARCH,
2008**

By

*Oko Catholic Community
St. Peter's Catholic Church, Oko*

The Chairman of the occasion,
Our Chief Guest, Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp.

The Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Innocent Muomegha,
Rev. Fr. Anthony Ezekannagha,
The Rev. Frs. Brothers and Sisters,
The Knights and Ladies of the Church,
The C.M.O,
The C.W.O,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, the entire Oko Catholic Community and well-wishers, are gathered here today to bid farewell to Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp., after his stay at St. Peter's Catholic Church, Oko.

To you Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp., St. Peter's parishioners will say unanimously that since the inception of St. Peter's Catholic Church Oko as Parish in 1984, you are one of the Parish Priests we have had and you were the longest served Parish Priest. You came here in 1996 and left us in 2007. What a long time; we say congratulations!

You are endowed with many admirable qualities. Your boldness, in condemning evil, you are outspoken, patient, prayerful, and has personal integrity. As a priest of God, you are a natural winner of souls by your sheer personal example and comporment. You are sound in the Catholic doctrines. In your quotations of the Bible, you are second after Bishop Eneja. You speak Latin as if you were born in Rome. Fr., your spiritual and prayerful life is worth emulating. You prefer staying with the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament than watching the television and listening to radio. Your zeal to make little children better Christians is

manifested in your formation of St. John Bosco and St. Maria Goretti to catch our children young. We promise to continue with this your noble ideals under Holy Childhood Association.

When people heard of your transfer, many cried, while some rejoiced, you abhor gossips and lying. You always verify information given to you before taking action. Apart from these, you did much here during your eleven (11) years of winning souls for Christ:

- ✓ Completion of the Church of God,
- ✓ Settling disputes between brothers and sisters, husbands and wives and between different families in the Church,
- ✓ Reconciling the widows and giving them hope,
- ✓ Conversion of pagans and baptizing them,
- ✓ Helping the down-trodden and encouraging them,
- ✓ Payment of all the Parish dues at Awka and lastly,
- ✓ A father of fathers.

The Oko Catholic Community saw you as the priest of God, simple, unassuming and humorous. On the part of the elders of the Church, they loved you much, but some youths misunderstood you because you are strict and a no nonsense priest. Don't mind them – a generation gap.

Finally, to you Fr., Oko is now your second home, each time you come we must accept you wholly and entirely. May the many graces which the good Lord has bestowed on you bring greater peace and blessings so that you will be able to say with St. Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have

finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim.4:7). As a token, a token because nothing that we can offer as a parting gift in the nature of material things can ever adequately represent our hearts’ indebtedness to you, please accept this token . . . as a keep sake. We thank everybody here and wish you all journey mercies when going back to your various destinations in Jesus Name, Amen!

Signed by
Sir Marcel Okpala
1st Vice Chairman, P.P.C.

Okechukwu G.N.
Secretary, P.P.C.

Rev. Fr. Innocent Muomegha
Parish Priest

(B)
VOTE OF THANKS FOR THE RETREAT MODERATORS
AT THE END OF THE YEAR RETREAT

By
The Fourth Year Theologians
Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu

The Fourth Year theologians have drunk immensely from the spiritual well of Very Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo. Fr. Akanigwo is a veteran retreat moderator who has travelled far and near to preach retreats to Religious and lay faithful alike. Of all Priests in Nigeria, Fr. Akanigwo is the only one who has had the very rare privilege of preaching retreat in Mother Bigard on not less than three occasions. Bigard is

always known for excellence. We always go for the best. To have invited Fr. Akanigwo on three different occasions means that among the best he has remained the best for decades.

Fr., we are happy with you and if at all anybody can make God happy I think you have made him happier by letting the Deacons and Fourth Year theologians know what awaits them in the ministry. So great was your power of speech, so enriching was your spirituality and so tantalizing was your fatherly advice, mastery of the Scripture and personal devotion to the Eucharistic Jesus that Very Rev. Fr. Theophilus Anyanwu was completely seduced by your talks and spirituality so much so that he did not miss any major part of the retreat with the Deacons and Fourth Year theologians. He participated in all the conferences.

Fr. Akanigwo, you are a modern day Father of the Church. Our faith has been unequivocally strengthened by your practical and exemplary retreat. We are grateful, Father.

(C)

BEHOLD! A TYPICAL PRIEST OF GOD

By

Sir Edwin Chuks Ubboh, KSJ

Our Lady of Fatima Parish

Woliwo, Onitsha

In 1984, during the annual Pentecost Week activities usually organized by the Onitsha Archdiocesan Catholic Charismatic Renewal, a black cord tying Holy Ghost Father was invited



Fr George Akanigwo with one of his many Daughters in Christ

from his Parish at Isieniu-Nsukka to come and deliver a talk at the Immaculate Heart Parish Fegge-Onitsha Centre, courtesy of the Planning Committee headed by my Mentor

and Motivator in the Charismatic circle, Bro. Ignatius Ibeke who was my teacher/instructor in the then Evangelical Group, now Teaching Ministry of the Renewal at Sacred Heart Parish, Odoakpu, Onitsha.

Rev. Fr. George O. Akanigwo, CSSp., as we got to know his name through introduction, dealt extensively on the lecture that the jam-packed vast arena of Immaculate Heart Parish was so spiritually uplifted. The faithful were so deeply touched by his teachings which were well backed with biblical references. As the lecture topic bothered on “Spiritual Warfare with Satan,” Fr. George who is very versatile with the Bible gave the congregation the not well acknowledged tactics and strategies frequently used by Satan which he tagged “Akatakos” to devour the people of God. He ended his lecture a little bit late but not without succeeding in reconciling people with God. Yet with Fr. George’s lecture – the people of God felt they have been served the only food they needed in the week long activities that day. The following day, the people were eagerly scrambling for Priests to hear their confession for a total reconciliation with God.

As for me, that lecture was to become a turning point to my spiritual life. With the recorded cassette of that talk which I use very often in my car, I got so imbibed with reflections on the subject matter – Our Daily War with Satan. How to win the war, of course as Fr. George taught us, it is through the Sacraments of the Church, our deep affection for the Sacraments will not allow us fall prey to Satan . In the Catholic Charismatic, people kept asking the leaders, “Who

is this Holy Ghost, Father?” No definite answer was readily available because Fr. George who was to answer some of the questions was again out of sight, but the then Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha, Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Ezeanya of blessed memory, moved by the Holy Spirit was making plans for the people of God at Onitsha including my humble self to have the full taste of this wonderful gift of God to the Church – Fr. George O. Akanigwo, CSSp.

In May 1986, Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Woliwo, Onitsha was created from Christ the King Parish, Onitsha by Late Archbishop Ezeanya and handed over to the Holy Ghost Fathers to man and Fr. Akanigwo was drafted from Isienu-Nsukka to Onitsha to come and nurture the young Parish to maturity. Through the Holy Spirit, Fr. Akanigwo worked tirelessly for ten years and seven months at Woliwo Parish touching and converting every soul that came across him, showing the people of God what it takes to lead by example, drawing people nearer to God through the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance of which he has no tag. Approach him any time and he will freely accept to hear your confession.

His love for the people to know God forced him to open up two out-stations in Zones Four and Five in the Parish where he celebrates the Eucharist on alternative basis for the grassroots. A disciple of the much cherished Archbishop Ezeanya’s “The Poor in our Midst.” Fr. Akanigwo devoted most of his time to sending Holy Communion to the sick at homes, mending broken homes, consoling the sick and the bereaved by constantly celebrating masses for them, etc.

His deep concern for people's salvation quickly focused him as the peoples' Priest because he preaches in and out of season as St. Paul admonished in one of his letters.

Thank God, I soon developed a very deep relationship with him and he became my immediate family's spiritual director. He kept guiding my family at close watch of which I am thankful. Rev. Fr. Akanigwo exhibited what it takes to be a good Priest through his actions and life pattern. For ten years and seven months he was at Woliwo, nobody had seen on him any other dress than the Soutine, however I am in the group that believes that hood does not make the monk. Fr. Akanigwo though as should priests, does not eat publicly nor is he in good terms with drinks, even soft drinks. He preaches the word of God even through his eating pattern, because these long years I only saw him eat in the Fathers' refectory. What a wonderful way of commanding respect from your parishioners.

While we continue to thank God for the gift of Fr. George Akanigwo to the Catholic Church, we have to spare time too, to thank Late Madam Monica Akanigwo posthumously for donating Fr. George, her only child to the Church, what a precious gift; May God reward her in Heaven, Amen.

For the faithful in Woliwo Onitsha, Fr. Akanigwo has left an indelible mark for us to tow, having received the word in full these long years, we should not allow ourselves to stray, rather we should try to proclaim the message of embracing the Sacraments to the people (2Tim.2:1) as strongly taught us by Fr. George Akanigwo.

For God's people at Oko in Awka Diocese (Fr. Akanigwo's new location), 1997 will obviously be remembered as the year God decided to visit you in a special way with His precious gift, a gift that is not commonly found – Fr. Akanigwo. All you need do is to open up and receive this gift, through which you will readily receive the word of God in its fullest.

For priests, you should try to lead the people of God by example, do the work of priests without reservations, attract God's people to the Sacrament of the Church always, preach in and out of season as priests with authority, for the Church needs nothing short of good priests, Rev. Fr. George Akanigwo, CSSp., stands as one of the typical example of the quality of priests the Church needs today.

(D)

THE PRIEST WITH A DIFFERENCE!

By

Mrs. Udorji Lydia A.

Q.R.C., Onitsha

This is our dear Rev. Father George Akanigwo. The Lord endowed him with special talents which he optimally utilized in the Lord's vineyard at Woliwo for these past ten years. Our Lady of Fatima parish which took off like a mustard seed has become the giant tree under Rev. Father George. Bravo!

The Greater Tomorrow – children, infants and sucklings, he has gathered and trained in a special way to adore and serve God. From his unique knowledge of the Bible, he has made many of these youngsters perform wonders as they read and quote special chapters and verses. His fatherly interaction with them, especially at Saturday Morning Masses, has made a mark in their life. They can express themselves freely before the whole congregation while answering numerous vital questions from the Holy Bible, doctrines and teachings of the Catholic Church. This is a laudable achievement.

Rev. Father George made tireless effort to organise, direct and encourage the Catholic teachers of the Parish in particular, and throughout the Archdiocese in general. It is not surprising that he has been made the overall chaplain for Catholic Teachers in Onitsha Archdiocese.

His concern for the widows, the oppressed and the orphans is unparalleled. He has left no stone unturned in identifying himself with the sufferings of this group of people, by giving them redress, moral and spiritual encouragement. It is only the Lord who can take accurate record of these various selfless services in His Vineyard.

Our dear Rev. Father George, while we say goodbye and wish you the best of luck in your new station, we pray that God will shower on you more of His blessings, wisdom, good health, courage, protection and guidance as you continue to shepherd the flock he has entrusted to you, in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.