

## **Nigeria**

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The Baltimore Province began its official history in Nigeria in 1974 when S. Melmarie Gentry accepted the invitation of Bishop Obot, auxiliary of the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene, and Dominic Cardinal Ekandem to teach mathematics in both the seminary and girls' school in Eriarm. S. Gabriel Roeder and S. Maris Simon (MK) followed in S. Melmarie's footsteps in 1977.

In 1981, Sisters Gabriel Roeder, Dorothy Hunt and Virginia Brien went to Ikot Ekpene to teach in the secondary commercial school. During this interval the chief and villagers in Ikot Etuk Odo gave land for a convent, and the artisans of the village built a convent. In 1984, Cardinal Ekandem blessed it and the Sisters moved from temporary rented quarters to the residence. The next building to be erected on this property, through the generosity of our Sisters in the Bavarian Province, was the Center for Teaching. This building originally the Mother Caroline Nursery/Primary School is now the Notre Dame Nursery/Primary School. Their salaries and money from the Baltimore Province supported the Sisters.

S. Eugenia Forbeck arrived in 1985 followed by S. Jane Irons in 1987. At this time a second Convent in Uyo at 28 Brooks Street was rented. This was a flat in a diocesan building owned by Bishop Usanga and renovated by S. Gabriel Roeder. In 1989, the Formation House was built in the Mbribit section of the Diocese of Uyo and presently houses the postulants and the professed sisters who work with them in formation.

In 1989, S. Martin Colbert (CH) went to Nigeria to be Directress of Postulants and S. Anne Vogel arrived and was assigned Assistant Directress. Recognizing that we are called to proclaim the Good News in Africa, we committed ourselves as a Province to risk our resources to respond to this call as we welcomed Nigerian women to share in the life of our Congregation. On August 15, 1989, S. Christine Mulcahy, Baltimore Provincial, accepted five Nigerian Postulants. The simple ceremony in the Convent chapel initiated a one-year postulancy, followed by a two-year novitiate in Ghana at the West African Novitiate Compound. In January 1993, S. Anne Vogel became Directress of Postulants.

In 1992, S. Sharon Dei, became the eighth member of the Baltimore Province in Nigeria. She was Professor at the St. Augustine Major Seminary at Jos, Plateau State. Sharon died September 26, 2000, in Baltimore, Maryland.

In September 1994, S. Carol Schmitz (ML) joined our Sisters in Ikot Ekpene and in 1995 Sisters Anne Arthur Klinker (ML), Margaret Malone, Betty Roesser (BA), and Doreen Schommer (CA) joined the other SSNDs in ministering to the people of Nigeria.

In September 1996, a diocesan Junior/Senior Secondary Girl's Boarding School and Convent were opened in the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene at Urua Edet Obo. Through money from an estate with the express request to build a school in a third world country, a

project began in 1993 with S. Gabriel Roeder overseeing its development. The Notre Dame Girls Junior & Senior Secondary School opened its doors in September 1997 in the Diocese of Makurdi at Mkar in Benue State. The school opened with two classes of junior high students and one remedial class.

On November 14, 1992, Sisters Bernadette Amimi, Ngozi Udoye, Jacinta Anyanwu became the first Nigerian women to be professed as School Sisters of Notre Dame. On December 4, 1993, Sisters Grace Okon and Dorothy Enang were professed. Sister Priscilla Onwuka was professed on April 8, 1994, followed by S. Anastasia Arabome on May 6, 1995. Three women, Sisters Chinyere Bernadine Amadi, Bessey Nwayibunna Eze, and Regina Genikache Oluah, were professed on May 4, 1995. Sisters Irene Eghonghon Aburime and Nentaweh Margaret Wakger were professed November 1997. Three Nigerian professed Sisters have made perpetual commitments; Bernadette Amimi (November 14, 1998) Grace Okon (December 4, 1999) and Priscilla Onwuka (March 25, 2000)

In July 2000, after three attacks by armed men within a year, it was decided to close the Convent in Ikot Etuk Odo. The Sisters moved to Theresa House in Ikot Ekpene for the duration of the school year. Sister Regina and Postulant Rosemary traveled to the school from St. Theresa each day. July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000 was the formal handing over of the property to the bishop. Thus, our presence ceased in that, our first convent, causing great sadness to the people of the village and the Parish.

Sisters have been engaged in educational ministries on the university, seminary, secondary, and primary levels. They have worked with catechist training programs, the mentally handicapped, and the hearing impaired, along with volunteer work at the Family Life Center and the Remand House, a detention center for youth.

As in any new endeavor, the Sisters experienced joy and anxiety, challenge and frustration, disappointment and hope. In community life, in ministry, and in all activities, the Sisters are sharing the Good News with the people, and the Sisters are being enriched by the Nigerian people and their culture and by religious of other congregations living and serving there.