

## **Challenges and Prospects in Sustaining the Missionary Activities of the Holy Ghost Congregation, Province of Nigeria, South-East, 1980-2020**

Joseph Oguejiofor Okafor

### ***Abstract***

*The group of Eastern Nigerian members of the Holy Ghost Congregation who were once shattered and disheartened by the expulsion of their guardians and patrons from Nigeria in 1970, stunned critics when rather than disband, it struggled itself to survival, and by 1980, was set to launch itself into becoming a great missionary hub that became the Province of Nigeria South-East. Between 1980 and the dawn of 2020, its members responded actively to missionary engagements in many countries in all the continents of the world, and it even rose along the line to become the most numerous and active Province in the entire Holy Ghost Congregation and among all Catholic Male Religious Congregations in Nigeria. Its journey to greatness was riddled with great challenges. This work, applying thematic, quantitative and critical methods, examined some of these challenges in sustaining its missionary activity, as well as the response of the members of the Province to these challenges. It anchors their effort on Motivation Theory, and the finding is a success that was aided by dynamic leadership, resilience and commitment harnessed in a team work spirit and garnished by the support and goodwill of associates.*

**Key Words:** Missionary, Challenges, Sustenance, Holy Ghost Congregation

## **Introduction**

After a battle for survival from a shattering, crushing and near disbandment experience in February 1970, caused by the Government expulsion from Nigeria, of the European Catholic missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation (to be referred here as the Congregation) working then in former Biafran territories, the group of indigenous members of this Congregation was by 1980, relatively set to engage in international and intercontinental missionary activities. Its members were already engaged in two other countries. It was this group that became the Province of Nigeria South-East (often referred here as the ‘Province’ or the ‘group’), one of the circumscriptions (administrative jurisdictions) of the Holy Ghost Congregation. A circumscription of the Congregation was giving the status of a Foundation, a District, or a Province depending on its size and membership. The Province of Nigeria South-East covers the territories of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria.

With its August 2019 statistics of living members at five hundred and forty-seven (547): including priests, Deacons, Brothers, and senior seminarians, the Province of Nigeria South-East is currently, the most numerous indigenous circumscription in the entire Congregation, and the Congregation depends much on it for mission personnel. The Province has its members currently engaged in the missions of the Congregation in forty-one countries spread in all the continents of the world. Also, statistical data from various 2019 official Provincial Directories and Reports of the under listed most popular and biggest Catholic male religious Societies and Orders in Nigeria indicates that of all the male religious Societies and Orders, the Holy Ghost Congregation, Province of Nigeria South-East has the highest indigenous membership. The Claretian Missionaries (C.M.F.), Eastern

Province has 133 Priests and 45 seminarians; the Dominicans (OP), Province of St Joseph the Worker (Nigeria and Ghana): 1 Bishop, 133 Priests, 4 Deacons, 2 Brothers, and 58 seminarians; The Society of African Mission (SMA): 109 Priests, 1 Deacons, 4 Brothers, and 33 seminarians; The Capuchin Franciscans (OFM) from Nigeria: 82 members including Priests, Brothers, and seminarians; The Vincentians, Province of Nigeria (in 2017): 103 Priests and 83 seminarians. This presents the Province as the main Catholic missionary hub in Nigeria and possibly in Africa.

The wonder on how this once young and very fragile indigenous group of missionaries, which counted only two external missions in 1980, with relatively weak resources, was able to emerge a large and leading missionary group precipitated this work aimed at examining the challenges that confronted the Province, and the factors that led to its emergence as a large missionary group. Lack of literature on the Holy Ghost Congregation in Nigeria in the period under review is a major challenge to this work, as the only one text, Casimir Iheanyi Eke's *In the Footsteps of Our Founders: A History of the Spiritan Province of Nigeria, 1953 – 2002*, seems to have treated some aspects of it. The 1980 starting scope for this work marked a decade the indigenous members of the Province assumed charge of their young group with the exit of their expatriate guardians. By 1980, the group's struggle for survival had relatively relaxed, and it was set for missions outside the country. The terminal choice date of (February) 2020 marked the fiftieth anniversary (Golden Jubilee) of the group's assumption of its own charge with the expulsion of their expatriate patrons.

The concept of 'mission' has been primarily defined by the Catholic Church as:

The special undertakings in which preachers of the Gospel, sent by the Church, and going into the whole world, carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among people who do not yet believe in Christ.... Such undertakings are accomplished by missionary activity .... (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 December, 1965).

In sustaining such missionary activity of their Congregation, the members of the Province of Nigeria South-East seem to have been influenced by the core of ‘Motivation Theory’. Vroom propounds that motivation is the amount a person will be moved by the situation one finds oneself in; and it is arrived at through Expectancy, Instrumentality, and Valence (“Theories of Motivation”, retrieved, April 8, 2016). Motivation theorists generally identify three motivators or characteristics of motivation. McClelland for instance, identified three motivators that he believed we all have. They are: “a need for achievement, a need for affiliation, and a need for power.” (“McClelland's Human Motivation Theory,” retrieved, April 8, 2016).

### **The Situation of the Province before 1980**

The Igbo say that “*Mbeledenyiri dike, ma mbeledekaejiama dike*” (an unexpected challenge humiliates a strong man, but it also reveals a strong man). History has severally proved this right in political, economic and religious circles. Between 1970 and 1980, the former Eastern Nigerian members of the Holy Ghost Congregation laboured from uncertainties to becoming a people of hope. As at February 1970, their group had no legitimate administration, no functional formation house (seminaries), acute shortage of personnel, no mission engagements, too much awaiting reconstruction work, and acute shortage of fund. The exceptional

courage and commitment the group displayed in its struggle to survive as a missionary group revealed the group as the proverbial *dike* (strong man). By the end of 1980, the group had been able to establish a legitimate Administration and experienced three smooth administrative transitions. It had been able to move from an Irish Eastern Nigeria District of the Holy Ghost Congregation to an independent District of Nigeria East of the Congregation in 1971, and then to a Province of Nigeria-East in 1976. Before 1980 also, it had been able to reopen and maintain very functionally, its basic formation houses (the junior seminary at Ihiala, the Novitiate at Awo-Omamma, and the School of Philosophy at Isieniu Nsukka), while its seminarians in Theology studies were well integrated in Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu. Within the period too, the group had been able to train a good number of its personnel who became available for different responsibilities that were important to the group.

Furthermore, the group had, between 1970 and 1980, constantly improved its financial base, gradually moving away from being nearly totally dependent on external help, to being able to finance over thirty percent of its annual expenditure. For instance, in 1978 the financial score sheet of the Province gave the following figures: Total Expenditure, ₦235,276.35; income from members and their works, ₦79,453.95; and the percentage of expenditure covered by the income from members and their works, 33.8% (Okafor, 2019). The Province had equally established some self-reliance projects including the Spiritan Farm Okija and the Spiritan Bookshop, Ihiala. Most importantly too, as a member of an international missionary religious Order, it had started to participate in the missions of the Congregation outside Nigeria. It sent Father (Fr.) Casimir Eke to the Gambia in 1977, and Fr. Eugene Uzukwu to the Congo in 1979 (Eke, 2006). It must be said

too, that some level of incompetence of some members, retarded the progress of the Province. For instance, some of its self-reliant projects like the transport business, cement, and block businesses collapsed under poor management. These could have been very supportive to the group had it survived. By the end of 1980, the Province of Nigeria-East, with a membership of one Bishop, fifty-one priests, three Brothers, and a number of professed seminarians (Okafor, 2019), was more or less stabilized as a missionary group, and was set to launch itself into a great missionary hub.

### **The Challenges in Sustaining the Missionary Activities of the Province of Nigeria South-East, 1980-2020**

In its missionary activities from 1980, the members of the Province of Nigeria South-East spread out in the world. They have participated in missions in fifty-one countries, engaging in pastoral, medical and education apostolates, refugee and youth ministries, among others. By the dawn of 2020, they were present in forty-one countries. Its members founded four big female and four male religious Congregations and societies. In the course of their missionary activities in the world, the members encountered wide-ranging challenges that affected their performance as individuals or as a group, including administrative, organizational, personnel, financial, and cultural challenges.

**The Challenge of Unity:** In 1979, the General Council of the Holy Ghost Congregation created a new circumscription, the West African Foundation (WAF), to hold together and harness for the Congregation, without prejudice to the existence of the Province of Nigeria-East, vocations from different parts of West Africa including the Districts of Makurdi and Kwara-Benue in Nigeria (under the British and the French Canadian Holy Ghost

missionaries respectively) (Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, July-August, 1979). The inclusion of these two districts worried the Province of Nigeria-East, and it petitioned against that, questioning the role of the Congregation in the effort to achieve a reconciled Nigeria. It rather proposed one Nigeria Province that would recruit vocations from all parts of Nigeria. On October 2, 1983, the General Council changed the Province of Nigeria-East to the Province of Nigeria made open to members from other parts of Nigeria. This brought challenges with it. The new structure was displeasing to the Districts of Makurdi and Kwara-Benue. Fr. Rheum Saint-Louis, then District Superior of Kwara-Benue, after some foot-dragging, began to send aspirants of the District to the Province in 1986. Fr. Vincent Griffin, District Superior of Makurdi, on the other hand, needed to consult first with members of the District and his home English Province before the decision could be followed (Eke, 2006). Be that as it may, Makurdi District never sent its candidates to the Province of Nigeria until 2001.

The challenge was how to forge a unity amongst these members to come from the diverse ethnic nations that were supposedly, socially and politically antagonistic to each other, yet would embrace a common mission. For the members of the former Province, in a nation like Nigeria where the wounds of ethnicity were beckoning for care and healing, the Church's mission should be an eloquent witness, and the Holy Ghost Congregation as a frontline missionary group in Nigeria should be a vanguard of such witnessing. Successive administrations thus, engaged the two Districts to realize of this mission. Under Fr. Mike Onwuemelie's administration, the parties reached an accord to realize this union. A joint committee set up for this agreed on the year 2000 for the take-off of the new provincial union. On May 27, 1998, the

Superior General conveyed that following the proposals of the Committee and the Superiors, the General Council decided that:

1. A new and more decentralized Province of Nigeria will be set up, with regions. It will be the Province of all future Nigerian Spiritans. Those from Nigeria who are already members of WAF will be free to choose to stay there or join the newly constituted Province. The new Province will begin in the year 2000.... (Letter of Pierre Schouver, Superior General; to Father Mike Onwuemelie, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1998).

For want of necessary structures, the new union took off in October 2001 with temporary headquarters at 3-3 Junction, Onitsha. For ease of administration, the new Province had four semi-autonomous Regions namely: Ekiti (covering old Western Region of Nigeria), Makurdi (Benue State and the North East part of Nigeria), Okura (parts of North Central and North West Nigeria), and Onitsha (the old Eastern Region of Nigeria). However, the union under one large Province of Nigeria did not work smoothly as expected. Consequently, the General Council in its meeting of September 20, 2010, decided to suppress and restructure it. Part of this decision read:

2. As from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2010, the Province of Nigeria is suppressed. As from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2010, the following circumscriptions are created: the Province of Nigeria South East, the Province of Nigeria North East, the Foundation of Nigeria North West and the Foundation of Nigeria South West. (General Bulletin of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Vol. LXII, Number 787, No. 22).

Thus, the area under study became again a Province, known as the Province of Nigeria South-East, and thus responsible for the challenges that confronted its mission and activities worldwide.

The Province had also the challenge of a permanent administrative headquarters. Before 1970, its headquarters moved from Sacred Heart Parish, Odakpu, Onitsha to the Fathers' house at the Holy Ghost Juniorate Ihiala. When efforts to get back to Sacred Heart Parish or another place from Onitsha Archdiocese for its headquarters seemed futile, the Provincial administration under Fr. James Okoye acquired some land at 3-3 Junction, Onitsha. Before the 1985 centenary celebration, the group had built, blessed and officially opened its new and permanent Provincial headquarters, with a Pontifical Mass led by Bishop Anthony Nwedo, C.S.Sp. on November 30, 1985 (Eke, 2006). The headquarters offered a more effective environment for directing the activities of the Province. With the growth of the Province, a new and bigger house, the "Spiritual Provincial House of Welcome", was achieved under the Administration of Fr. Onwuemelie. It was opened in 1999, thus having the Provincial Secretariat in a separate building from the Provincial House.

The Province of Nigeria South-East faced challenges of harnessing and managing vocations. Sizeable and qualified personnel are crucial for the progress and success of any institution. In the 1970s, very few persons joined the Province as many believed that life in the Congregation was very austere. Recruitment was also challenged by lack of personnel and funds to run the seminaries meaningfully. However, some factors helped to improve recruitment in the period under review.

First, the stabilization of academic streams in the junior seminary at Ihiala ensured regular supply of aspirants. Second, many changed their views on life in the Congregation, having experienced more indigenous members of the Congregation. Again, there was a growing interest in clerical state in south eastern Nigeria. Improved formation facilities and personnel also

helped. In 1984, a new hostel was opened at the School of Philosophy, Isienu, and another was packed into in 2014. In 1987, the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, built with the help of the Generalate in Rome and the Province of Holland, with facilities containing about seventy rooms for students, and eight apartments for staff was opened. In 1988, the Spiritan Postulate Akabo, Imo State was opened for better training of Postulants. The added facilities led to improved intakes and quality of formation programmes. Records from the Vocation's office of the Province shows that there was an annual average intake of twenty-one (21) persons into the Novitiate from an average of forty-five (45) applications yearly between 1980 and 1988 and thirty-two (32) annual average intake against one hundred and thirty-three (133) applications annually between 1989 and 2001. Between 2001-2010, under the one Nigeria Province, the adopted quota system forced the then Onitsha Region to admit twenty (20) candidates annually into the Postulate (Agbonome, 2016). From 2011, however, with increased rationalization of intake into diocesan seminaries in the region, annual applications into the Province has been averagely about one thousand (1000) while annual average intake into the Postulate became thirty-five (35).

Furthermore, The Province showed concern in getting personnel for formation houses as well as the quality of such personnel. Its 1984 Provincial Chapter agreed that:

The increasing pace of change in the world, the growing diversity of tasks required in our apostolate and the greater demands made on our Province call for a dynamic approach to the formation of Spiritans. To realize our aims and orientations, the formation of formators should be high in our scale of priorities. (Eke, 2006).

Subsequent Provincial administrations tried to effect this. To improve and also enable replacement of formation personnel when necessary, members were often sent on further studies. Below, the number on further studies at progressive intervals reveals the effort in further training of personnel.

**Figures of members of the Province who were officially on further studies**

<b>Year</b>	1990	1996	2001	2006	2011	2015	2019
<b>Figure</b>	16	17	21	22	14	20	16

**Source:** From the various annual Provincial Directories of the Province.

This shows that an average of eighteen members were on further studies at these intervals. With improved and stabilized formation houses, the personnel challenges gradually reduced. Thus, from one hundred and eleven (111) members in 1980, the Province, by August 2019, boasted of five hundred and forty-seven (547) members. This figure excludes the deceased members and those dismissed from, or who voluntarily left the Province between 1980 and 2019. The growth in membership enabled the Province to provide a reasonable number of personnel for its numerous mission engagements. The periodical membership situation is presented here below.

## Periodic statistics of membership growth in the Nigeria South-East

Year	No. of Bishops	No. of Priests	No. of Brothers	Professed/ non-Professed Seminarians	Total of Professed & with non-Professed	Periodic increase difference	Periodic % increase	Increase in % from 1980	Death Since 1970
1980	1	51	3	56	111				1
1985	1	81	4	88	174	63	67%	67%	4
1990	2	104	6	107	219	45	26%	97.3%	4
1995	2	175	6	114	297	78	36%	167.6%	6
2000	2	204	6	127	339	42	14%	205.4%	10
2005	1	251	6	118	376	37	11%	239%	13
2010	1	304	7	126	438	62	16.5%	295%	19
2015	-	355	6	49 (139)	410 (500)	-29 (62)	14.2%	350.5%	28
2019	-	377	6	64 (170)	447 (547)	37 (47)	9.4%	393%	42

**(Source:** The figures presented here were summed-up from different official Directories and Bulletins of the Congregation and the Province).

Under 2015 and 2019 rows, the figures in brackets were obtained after adding the non-professed senior seminarians that were in Philosophy studies or in the required Novitiate year before one could profess into the Congregation. These members have limited privileges. Prior to 2011, the Novitiate year came before Philosophy studies. From the table, an increase in the membership by 393% between 1980 and 2019 was recorded. It is seemingly a remarkable growth.

Finances were the greatest challenge faced by the Province of Nigeria South-East in its life and missionary activities. Everything that was to be done by the Province required funding, including keeping a functional administration and training of seminarians and personnel. For instance, the Province spent the following sums on formation programmes in some financial years: 2011: ₦41,889,233.00; 2012: ₦34,714,032.00; 2013: ₦34,716,102.00; 2014: ₦53,545,773.00; and 2015: ₦37,429,251.00 (Agbonome, 2016). Mission engagements and activities, or necessary projects depended much on availability of funds, and the cost implications were very huge and most often, way beyond the reach of the Province. A look at the percentage of income from members and the works of the Province *vis-à-vis* its expenditure during the period could help here. From the table below, it is evident that left on its own, the Province would not have been able to adequately fund its life and activities.

**Table 19: Random summary of the income and expenditure of the Province in naira (₦)**

Items	1978 (₦)	1983/84 (₦)	1990/91 (₦)	1998/99 (₦)	2014/15 (₦)
Total Expenditure	235,276.35	520,462.82	5,136,856.66	45,489,348.37	171,602,322.00
% of expenditure covered by income from members and works	33.8%	35.2%	8%	20.4%	80.8%

(Source: Different Provincial Bursars' Financial Reports in CSSP Archives Onitsha, Box 4).

In order to exist and meaningfully execute its missionary activities, the Province largely depended on, and engaged in different measures of fund drive. Such measures taken included:

**a) Contributions and Remittances from Members:** This was a major source of revenue for the Province. The Rule of the Congregation has it that, “Whatever we receive as a gift or in payment for our work – gifts, salaries, pensions, grants, insurance benefits, mass stipends and every other income we may derive from our work – belongs to the Congregation.” (Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2013). The contributions came from remunerations that accrued to the Province from the parishes and dioceses where its members worked. Other remittances came from stipulated percentages of the monthly earnings of salaried members.

**b) The Holy Ghost Vocation Movement:** The Movement founded by Father Raymond Arazu in 1973 allows volunteers to participate in the mission of the Holy Ghost Congregation through monetary contributions (Arazu, 2016). It grew to include outright sponsorship of seminarians in their course of training. Sponsors voluntarily payed stipulated amount annually for eight years, for training a seminarian, or payed a stipulated part of it as co-sponsor. Currently, the Movement has its headquarters in Port Harcourt, with Assistant Directorates at Awo-Omamma, Enugu, and Onitsha. The Movement became a major financier of the formation programmes of the Province.

**c) The Mission Office** was first created in the Province in 1991 with office at the “Spiritans Mission House”, Nike Avenue, Trans-Ekulu, Enugu. Fr. Jude Ogbenna was its first Director. It created awareness on the missions of the Province and their challenges,

and solicited material support for them. The Provincial Bursar's Annual Reports show that the Office shared the sum of twenty-eight thousand, nine hundred naira (₦28,900.00) and clothing to five missions in 1992, and forty-six thousand naira (₦46,000.00) with other items to some missions in 1993 (CSSP Archives Onitsha, Box 4). It went moribund from 1994, but was reformed and renamed the Mission and Development Office in 2011 with Fr. Paschal Ndeze as its first Director. It currently makes annual remittances to the Province. The Office is located to the Provincial headquarters at 3-3 Junction, Onitsha.

**d) From Various Arms of the Congregation:** The general headquarters of the Congregation in Rome usually gave funds to the Province through its *Cor Unum* (Common Fund contributed to by various circumscriptions of the Congregation) shared annually to its circumscriptions according to priority needs of the Congregation. There were also solidarity funds given at times to the Province by sister Provinces in Europe and North America, as well as grants and donations from agencies and individuals. In earlier years, these funds constituted a huge source of income for the Province. As the years rolled by, however, the amount coming to the Province from the *Cor Unum* and the sister Provinces dropped drastically as the main donors from Europe and North America, began to witness major decline in vocations and finances. Such funds gave the following percentages of the total expenditures of the Province as indicated: 1983/84: 70%; 1990-93: 75.2%; 1998/99: 77.3%; 2011: 45.2%; and 2015: 27.4% (CSSP Archives Onitsha; Provincial Bursars' Annual Reports).

**e) Mission Appeals:** The Province also tried going to Parishes within and outside the country to talk about the works of the

Province and Congregation, and then solicit for financial assistance.

**a) Self-reliant Projects:** Beside maintaining the Spiritan Farm Okija and the Spiritan Bookshop established by the group in 1970s, the group established new self-reliant projects to supplement its sources of fund. These include educational institutions belonging to the Province. By 2020, such institutions included the Holy Ghost Juniorate Ihiala, Holy Ghost Academy Amaokpala, Father Philip Aguh Spiritan Academy Akabo, Bishop Okoye Spiritan Secondary School Asa, Oyiiboand Spiritan University, Nneochi. Like the Bookshop, the institutions have evangelizing and fund raising functions. There was also the Spiritan Communications started in 2005 with an internet *café* outfit but which soon began a computer literate training programme. Apart from reasonable cash profit, the outfit, more importantly, rendered invaluable services to the Secretariat of the Province for many years. It grew to give birth to the Spiritan Press, involved fully in printing and publishing works. It saved much money for the Province by doing much of its printing jobs (Provincial Bursar's Report, 2016).The Province also got involved in banking services through Ndiorah Microfinance Bank. According to Agbonome (2016), "former Onitsha Region ... inherited the certificate of former Ndiorah Community Bank from Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Edeh, C.S.Sp. in 2005".The Province settle the Bank's debts and moved it from five hundred thousand naira (₦500,000.00) capitalization to one hundred million naira (₦100,000,000.00) recapitalization in 2012, thus becoming a State Microfinance Bank (Agbonome, 2016).

There were also other business activities engaged on individual or group levels, or as a Province, including sales and

distributions, rentals, stock trading and so on. Sustaining these ventures was difficult and at times frustrating. For instance, lack of good access road to Spiritan Farm scuttled its success. More so, not linked to the national grid, and relying on private power generating sets, there were damages and unimaginable losses any time the generators broke down. At the height of such in 2003, it lost over a thousand birds and over ten thousand eggs that were to be hatched. With successive damages, the Farm managers were forced to abandon it. From 2011, the Farm started relaunching itself on smaller scales into crop production, fish farming, poultry and animal husbandry. Despite the setbacks, the ventures made it a lot easier to sustain the life and missionary activities of the Province, and to look to its possible future engagements without much fear.

Cultural Challenges at times make missionaries and their message difficult to accept as issues of religion are often viewed from the eyes of culture. Early Christians experienced such and in some cases, paid the supreme prize. Holy Ghost missionaries from Nigeria South-East were not insulated to cultural challenges, and even life threatening ones. For cases of cultural values, they generally sought to understand such practices and in line with Catholic teaching on inculturation, adopted those compatible with Christian doctrine into local Christian practices. There were also cases of cultural shocks. For instance, on his return from Theological studies in the USA in 1987, one seminarian was so disorientated that he opted to quit the Catholic priesthood and Christianity for Traditional Religion (Superior's report to Provincial Council, 26/5/87). Some members also found it hard to understand and accept some cultural dispositions of places they worked in, like among the Borana of Ethiopia, the Pigmies and the Bantu of the Congo; or in Papua New Guinea with the "Wantok

System” seen often as “unjust from the victim’s view point” and the disregard for privacy as one told (Okeke-Oraeki, December 1998 – May 1999). There were equally, cases of racial biases and differences as experienced by many who were sent to Europe and North America.

Again, there were challenges of extreme nature. Some cultures saw as threat, the presence of Holy Ghost missionaries. First, at a point in Toto, Nassarawa State of Nigeria, the Igbirra saw the Holy Ghost missionaries’ presence with their Church and schools as sources of enlightenment for the Bassa, who otherwise, were preferred to remain unenlightened and exploited. Thus the Igbirra set to destroy the missionaries and their activities there. Fr. Peter Dike, then Parish Priest of Toto, became a wanted person. Incessant deadly attacks on the staff of St. Peter’s College led to the withdrawal of the missionaries from there, especially as most Bassa people had fled the town (Eke, 2006). Another case led to the death of Rev. James Eke while on a year pastoral experience in Holy Angel’s Parish, Sharia, Kogi State, and living in the village called Odulo. Some locals warned him to stop preaching against certain local practices. On the night of March 11, 1993, he was kidnapped from his residence and some days after, a search team of the Police and some villagers found his mutilated and dead body hanging on a tree (Emeanuo, December 1998 – May 1999).

The Province over the years, employed as much as possible, measures to tackle these cultural challenges to its missionary activities. It sent seminarians to other cultures within and outside Nigeria for a period of pastoral experience before they proceeded to study Theology, or had them study Theology in those countries, so that while studying there, they acquired meaningful intercultural and international exposure that did help them after their ordinations. Two scholastics, Francis Ejimofor and Lawrence

Nwaneri did one year in Solwezi Diocese, Zambia from 1985 to 1986 (CSSP Archives Onitsha, Box 9, File 17; Fr. B. Ikegwonu's letter to Rt. Rev. A. Potani, 21/9/1985); Joseph Okafor served one year in Toto, then Plateau State in 1994/95, and so were many others sent to different cultures. For Theology studies outside Nigeria, Samuel Muodiaju and Jude Uche went to England in 1982, Gregory Iwuzor and Ferdinand Ezekwonna went to Germany in 1983, and Sebastian Ehujuo and Ikechukwu Nwakor to the U.S.A., while Basil Agba and Edward Okorie went to France in 1984, among others. The 1990s saw the Province extend the programme to Africa countries like Kenya, Congo Republic and Cameroon. Added to these, and for the purpose of enriched cultural exchanges, the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isieniu Nsukka was from 1985, opened to Holy Ghost scholastics from parts of Nigeria and West Africa, and the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu opened in 1987, has played host to students from East, West, Central, and Southern African countries. Suffice it to say that these arrangements paid-off greatly in mission engagements of the Province and its members.

For life threatening challenges, the Province usually withdrew its members and then re-strategized if there was still chance to continue in the mission. Such was the approach in Toto in 1998. And in areas where Christian proselytization was officially outlawed, members of the Province were engaged in international groups of Holy Ghost missionaries as Non-Governmental Organizations, while witnessing to the Gospel through their personal and collective activities. Such experiment was what Frs. Brendan Aroh and Damasus Okoro were involved in Pakistan in 2005, Joseph Okoro and others in Taiwan since 2005, James, Nwauzor in India, and Henry Osuji in Algeria.

### **Assessment of the Response of the Province of Nigeria South-East to the Challenges**

Here, an attempt is made to assess the response of the Holy Ghost Congregation, Province of Nigeria South-East to the challenges it presented above. In resolving the administrative challenges of the group, the key tool was leadership as rightly pointed out by the Emeritus Catholic Bishop of Orlu, Most Rev. Gregory Ochiagha, when he averred that: One of the best things that happened to the Holy Ghost Fathers in this country since after the civil war is the gift of good leaders who have good vision, and are also hardworking. Generally... your Superiors ... took initiatives that placed them ahead of most other groups in our local church, and your members make those initiatives work tremendously because you trust in your leaders. (Interview, 15/03/2018).

Obviously, the Province was able, over the years to select dynamic, charismatic and flexible leaders, able enough to read the signs of time and adjust to relevant changes required to move the Province forward. This led to a steady growth of the Province. A pointer to this is the consistent representation of the Province in the eight-member General Council of the Congregation in Rome since 1980. The Council has the general responsibility of the entire Congregation. It is better appreciated from the fact that members of the Council usually emerge in periodic elections done by the entire Congregation. The Province is only one out of forty-five (45) circumscriptions the eight General Councillors could be elected from. One can say that the leadership dynamism in the Province grew from the good administrative environment in place, and the formidable training that was open to its members in varied fields of endeavour, as well as the opportunities members had to acquire local and international exposures which helped to enrich their experiences.

The response to personnel challenges, harnessing and managing vocations gave room to growth in membership size and quality that placed the Province at the top of the Congregation table, ahead of older Provinces, and most African Provinces that received the missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation before the peoples of the Province of Nigeria South-East. These African Provinces had the following figures as at December, 2019: Cameroon - 96, Congo Brazzaville - 70, Congo Kinshasa - 68, Gabon - 33, Senegal (PANO) - 43, and Tanzania - 142. Hard work and commitment of members basically attracted vocations to the Province, leading to this commendable growth.

### **Professed Membership situation of leading Provinces at different periods**

<b>Circumscription</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2015(January)</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>Congregation</b>	<b>3562</b>	<b>3106</b>	<b>2852</b>	<b>2630</b>	<b>2639</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>984</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Netherland</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Portugal</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>54 (with Belgium)</b>
<b>Nigeria South East</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>447</b>

**Source:** (*General Bulletin of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, Vol. LVI; Vol. LVII; Vol. LXII, and C.S.Sp. ÉTAT du PERSONNEL – Statistiques – 31 décembre 2015 and December, 2019*).

The huge membership was also creamed with quality. No wonder members of the Province have often held important offices in mission lands they worked in. For instance, in 2012, nine members of the Province were simultaneously Superiors of other Circumscriptions including in Nigeria South-West, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Germany, Province of Europe, French Guyana, Papua New Guinea and Philippines. At some other times, members of Nigeria South-East origin were Superiors in places like Gabon, Malawi, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Netherlands, United Kingdom and Taiwan (Okafor, 2019). This notwithstanding, some members of the group were undeniably deficient in quality. This, admittedly, gave the group a human face. Furthermore, despite its membership size and quality, the Province has never had enough personnel to meet with mission demands made on it. This may be caused by its regulation of intake for lack of space and funds.

The response to financial challenges had both positive and negative scores. Though the Province made spirited effort to invest broadly, its members were ill equipped to pilot some of the ventures it embarked on, and in other cases, they either engaged unqualified or uncommitted persons. This explains why some ventures they went into, such as the Coca Cola Distributorship failed. In some of its establishments, other factors combined to make them unsuccessful. In the Spiritan Farm Okija, for instance, incompetent hands and poor location of the Farm in an area deficient in basic amenities combined to retard its growth despite the huge sums of money invested in it.

Positively, the Province improved its financial independence. Granted that in some years, it only generated very little percentages of its annual expenditures, possibly because of increased responsibilities, it improved in fund generation, even to the tune of eighty percent of its financial responsibilities by 2015.

This shows its ability over the years to diversify and improve its fund raising events, and yet remain strong in mission commitments. Three key things led to the much success in tackling the financial Challenges of the Province. These were the solidarity of the General Headquarters and sister Provinces of the Congregation; the goodwill generated from the cherished legacies of the expatriate Holy Ghost missionaries in the region before 1970 which attracted the support received through the Holy Ghost Vocation Movement; and the self-sacrifice and team spirit exhibited by the members of the Province. The progress is, therefore, not surprising.

The approach of the Province to cultural challenges through the establishment of seminaries with inter-cultural and international character, as well as sending seminarians out for inter-cultural and international experiences was practical and laudable. Equally, the sharing of lived experiences by members with those still in formation is a masterstroke to cultural challenges. These practices meaningfully helped to expose seminarians to different cultures and reduced cultural biases and possible shocks. Indeed, these were commendable responses.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of every mission is basically achievement. The presentation so far, revealed that the Province of Nigeria South-East was beset with many and diverse challenges in its bid to achieve its missionary objectives and remain affiliated to the worldwide family of the Holy Ghost Congregation. In the face of these challenges, the Province and its members, likely influenced by Motivation theories (specifically motivated the legacies of their predecessors, and the need to achieve greatness), took great positive strides to diffuse the challenges and that raised the

Province into a large and popular missionary group. The much progress made was aided by dynamic leadership, resilience and commitment harnessed in a spirit of team work as well as the support and goodwill of associates.

In all, the truth remains that the achievement of the Province could simply be rated as a partial success, considering the collapse of some of its projects due to human errors; the continued shortfall in personnel and its perennial inadequate fund status. These apparent deficiencies underline that despite the importance of dynamic leadership, resilience, commitment and team spirit in a missionary group, the Province (and indeed, missionary groups) need to improve its financial base and training curriculum so as to equip better its members and missions. Strong financial base is necessary for the 'largest group' to also have a 'big voice' even in a religious Order, else it will be a 'Big for nothing' that will be at the mercy of the wealthy few. Having said this, it suffices to note that it would be extremely difficult to eradicate challenges in any field of life; missionary life and activities not excluded, and so, it is expected that difficulties would continue to challenge the life and activities of missionaries. What counts more is that sincere and courageous effort is made to cushion such challenges through adequate dynamic training and the creation of viable financial base, so as to allow for the propagation of the Good News and the progress of mission.

## References

- Ad Gentes Divinitus*. (7 December, 1965). In Austin Flannery, O.P. (Ed.). (1981). *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Leominster: Fowler Wright Book Ltd.
- Agbonome, Peter Chukwuemeka C.S.Sp. (2016). *Report of Stewardship in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Nigeria South-East*. Onitsha: Spiritan Press.
- Arazu, R. C. (2016). *My Life journey*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.
- Congregation of the Holy Ghost, Province of Nigeria. (2001). *Provincial Directory 2001*. Onitsha.
- Congregation of the Holy Ghost, Province of Nigeria South-East. (2015). *2015 Spiritan Directory*. Onitsha.
- Congregation of the Holy Spirit. (1980). *1980 Etat du Personnel/Personnel Directory*. Rome: Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, Casa Generalizia.
- Congregation of the Holy Spirit. (2013). *Spiritan Rule of Life, 2013 edition*. Roma: Scuola Tipografica S. Pio X.
- Congregazione dello Spirito Santo. (July-August, 1979). *Spiritan News, No. 23*. Roma.
- Eke, Casimir Iheanyi C.S.Sp. (2006). *In the Footsteps of Our Founders: A History of the Spiritan Province of Nigeria, 1953 – 2002*. Onitsha: Spiritan Publications.
- Emanuo, Simon Onwukamike, C.S.Sp. (December 1998 – May 1999). The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Martyr of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Rev. James Eke, C.S.Sp. In *The Missionary, 4, 1*. (pp 14-19). Nsukka: Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers.
- General Bulletin of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, Vol. LVI, Number 780, 1985-1989*. (1990). Rome: Generalate C.S.Sp.

- General Bulletin of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Vol. LVII, Number 787, 1995-1997.* (1998). Rome: Generalate C.S.Sp.
- General Bulletin of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Vol. LXII, Number 787, 2009-2011.* (2011). Rome: Generalate C.S.Sp.
- Okafor, Joseph Oguejiofor. (2019). *The Missionary activities of the members of the Holy Ghost Congregation, Province of Nigeria, South-East, 1970-2015* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka.
- Okeke-Oraeki, Chinua Edward.(December 1998 – May 1999). Papua New Guinea: three Years of Missionary Experience in Aitape Diocese. In *The Missionary, 4,1.* (pp 22-26). Nsukka: Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers.

***Joseph Oguejiofor Okafor (Rev Fr Dr)*** is a lecturer in Department of History and International Studies, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Nigeria.