

## **THE DIOCESAN CHURCH AND CLERGY PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION**

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### **Introduction**

Issues related to personnel administration or human resources management has assumed the position of paramount importance to all social organizations including the Church. This is so because a harnessed talents or discerned/husbanded charisms are imperatives or desiderata to healthy functioning of all social institutions like the Church.

The Nigerian Church like other Churches is still in the process of reception of the dispositions of the Second Vatican Council and the 1983 Code of Canon Law that made far reaching legislations on personnel administration especially in determining the personnel needed in the Church, their qualities, the procedures for the appointment, resignations, transfers, removal/deprivations and maintenance etc. Okafor (1998) noted that often times relationships are strained either because of the conclave nature of administrative operations, appointment of certain persons with questionable integrity to exalted offices in the Church, nonexistent of personnel department and neglect in utilization of better qualified persons in areas of competence, unhealthy criticisms, sycophancy, jealousy and worst still presence of unproductive and under-utilized academic degrees and distracted concentration on wealth.

Our approach is to address these problems while setting out in form of recommendations roadmap for genuine harnessing of talents of the priests within the local Church. We shall first understand the nature of the diocesan Church, fundamentals in clergy personnel administration and conclude with a recommendation.

### **The Meaning of and Authority within the Diocesan Church**

#### **The Meaning of the Church**

According to Okolo (1991). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council aware that the Church is threandric (i.e. divine and human), instead of defining the Church, rather described the Church through some images drawn from the bible (Church as sheepfold of Christ, Church as the flock of God, Church as God's

field, Church as God's building, Church as God's household, God's dwelling among men, Church as temple, Church as the unblemished bride of the unblemished lamb, the loved bride of Christ, Church as both Sacrament and Sacrament of salvation, Church as the People of God, Church as Communion). However, John Paul II (1983) was to affirm clearly that:

Foremost among the elements which express the true and authentic image of the Church are the teaching whereby the Church is presented as the People of God and its hierarchical authority as service; and further teaching which portrays the Church as a communion. (p. Xix).

This Church as both people of God and communion is composed of clerics, religious and laity. The clerics are the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, while the Religious are drawn from both the clergy and the laity but marked with unique identity vows or promises of evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity, and the laity are those who are not clerics.

Furthermore, as the legislator stated, the Church, established and ordered in this world, is a society that is an organized society *sui generis*. This unique nature of the Church as an organized society with structures, rules and procedures for order, discipline and relationship must pervade all our understanding of the dynamics of Church governance (Okeke, 1993: 59).

### **The Meaning of Diocesan Church**

The term diocese emerged within the Roman Political arena to refer to the division of administrative provinces and parts of the state (Austin, 1983). In the Church, it assumed different understanding either as 'local Church' or as 'individual Church' or as 'ecclesiastical circumscription' or as 'particular Church' (Muller, 1992). Principally, the Fathers of Second Vatican Council in various places used the concept of 'particular' and 'local' Churches for dioceses or for the same region of culture or of the same rite. The 1983 new Code of Canon Law employed the term 'particular Church' only for the diocese. In this study we shall use the concepts of particular and local Churches interchangeably for the diocese.

It is within the jurisdiction of the supreme authority of the Church to erect particular Churches. Consequent upon this, a lawfully established diocese is *ipso iure* endowed with juridical personality and *de iure* subjects of rights and responsibilities. According to the new Code therefore, "A diocese is a portion of the people of God, which is entrusted to a Bishop to be nurtured by him, with the cooperation of the *presbyterium*, in such a way that, remaining close to its pastor and gathered by him through the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it

constitutes a particular Church. In this Church, the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church of Christ truly exist and functions.

In this notion of diocese presented by both the Council and the new Code, we discern these elements: The diocese is principally a particular Church, in which exists really and truly the unique Church of Christ. The diocese is also the portion of the people of God, i.e. a determined community of faithful and the place of Bishop's apostolate. In the diocese, the Bishop exercises the *diakonia* of the successor of the apostles and his authority as the pastor of this definite portion of the people of God in solidarity with his college of priests who are his “prudent cooperators” and “necessary helpers and counselors”. The diocesan Bishop acts in the person of the diocese in all juridical transactions (Vatican II, 1965).

### **The Authority in the Diocesan Church**

The Diocesan Bishop is the authority and legal representative within the particular Church. In this particular Church the diocesan Bishop represents his Church and indeed sums it up; he is the center of the apostolate, successor of apostles in the local Church community; he becomes the presence of the universal Church in the particular Church, sponsors of the universal Church and all Churches, and prelate of the people whom he governs.

The diocesan Bishop is designated by pontifical mandate. By his Episcopal consecration, his profession of faith and oath of fidelity to the Holy See and canonical possession or determination of mission, the Bishop assumes the identity and jurisdictional dignity over a particular Church and exercises his office in hierarchical communion with the head and college of Bishops. With this identity, the Bishop exists in a union (akin to marriage) with the particular Church and obliged to live with them and in their midst.

In contrast to the human origin and mandate of powers of secular authorities, canon 375 paragraph one makes it clear that episcopacy is of divine disposition, foundation and institution (Huels, 1989: 511). This sacred and ontological status is personal to the bishop.

In the light of the Conciliar decree *Christus Dominus* and the principle four of the revision of the Code, the legislator states that in the diocese entrusted to his care, the diocesan Bishop has all the ordinary, proper and immediate power required for the exercise of his pastoral office. Instead of the diocesan Bishop having only the ordinary and immediate powers as in the 1917 Code, he has in this new disposition all the ordinary, immediate, and proper powers in his particular Church (Peters, 2001). As a consequence, the power of diocesan

Bishop is *ordinary*, by the mere fact that it is attached to the office by virtue of law; *proper*, because it is exercised in his name, and *immediate*, because it is directly exercised over those entrusted to his care without intermediary or hindrance.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council and the legislator in the new Code see the diocesan Bishop as personally empowered by Episcopal consecration to exercise the three functions (*munera*) of teaching, sanctifying and governing or ruling. This authority is of divine disposition whereby the Bishops are uniquely constituted; Pastors in the Church, to be teachers of doctrine, the priests of sacred worship and the ministers of governance. These are integral to the sacred power of Bishop and necessary for the effective fulfillment of his ministry within the particular Church entrusted to his care.

In this Church the Bishop enjoys the power of jurisdiction which in canonical tradition is also called the power of governance (cann 129; 135). It is divided into legislative, executive and judicial powers. The legislator states that that the diocesan Bishop governs the particular Church entrusted to him with legislative, executive and judicial power, in accordance with the law.

Provost (1992) is of the view that by this power, he is responsible for those corporations' personnel, financial and property administration, public communication and other policies. He has become the chief judge in the diocese, the chief teacher and catechist, the chief pastor. Unlike in the political community, there is no true separation of powers in the Church. These powers in the diocese resides with the Bishop who exercises legislative power solely (cann 391, §2; 466) and executive and judicial powers personally or through the Vicars.

In summary, therefore, the diocesan Bishop is uniquely constituted a pastor and minister of governance, prelate of the community of faith and shepherds of the God's flock. Hence the weight of pastoral responsibility to govern the diocese falls squarely on the Bishop. It is the Bishops responsibility to coordinate all apostolic activities in the diocese (can 394), entire curia and the pastoral action of the Vicars general and Episcopal Vicars. In the Decree, *Christus Dominus*, the Fathers exhorted:

In exercising his office of father and pastor the bishop should be with his people as one who serves, as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, as a true father who excels in his love and solicitude for all, to whose divinely conferred authority all readily submit. He should so unite and mold his flock into one family that all, conscious of their duties, may live and act in the communion of charity"; Cf. also LG 27 where the Bishop is also exhorted to imitate the good

shepherd who came to serve and not to be served. Therefore, “He should not refuse to listen to his subjects whose welfare he promotes as of his own children and whom he urges to collaborate readily with him. Destined to render account for their souls to God (cf. Heb. 13:17), by prayer, preaching and all good works of charity he should be solicitous both for their welfare and for that two of those who do not belong to the unique flock, but whom he should regard as entrusted to him in the Lord. (Provost, 1992: 147).

### **The Juridical Status of Diocesan Clergy**

The canonical status of the diocesan clergy, which is his identity will touch his Christian, priestly and diocesan identities.

As a Christian, by virtue of baptismal rebirth, the diocesan clergy is incorporated into Christ and constituted a member of the people of God and a person in the Church. With the reception of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, the diocesan clergy is a fully initiated Christian. In addition to this, he shares the common priesthood with all the baptized who are given a share in the anointing of the Spirit. The diocesan clergy also enjoys full communion with the Church, and is endowed with rights and obligations open to all faithful. These rights include, Right to equality; Right to means of holiness and spiritual assistance; Right to spread divine message of salvation); Right to freely establish and direct associations or initiate apostolic actions; Right to Christian education and freedom to research; Right to petition and to due process; Right to good reputation and privacy; and finally Right to immunity from any kind of coercion in choosing a state of life.

As a Priest, the diocesan clergy enjoys the clerical state and is designated as a sacred minister or belongs to the ministerial priesthood, or ministers of apostolic mission. This status is effected by sacred ordination to the order of priesthood through the imposition of hands and prayers of consecration which transforms the individual with the imprint of unrepeatable and indelible character.

On the one hand, John Paul II (2003) stated the liturgical act of ordination produces the juridical effect of a unique identity of the diocesan clergy, that is, it configures him to trinity and makes him represent Christ sacramentally as *alter Christus*. This implies in essence as Okeke (2004) indicated, that “the priesthood is not a career or a job or an occupation that one chooses in order to advance one's interests, actualize one's potentialities or an opportunity to satisfy one's private ambitions. It is a vocation to serve God and humanity in total gift of oneself.

On the other hand, the juridic effect of ordination apart from the jurisdiction of teaching, sanctifying and ruling in the name and person of Christ, places one also in hierarchical communion. (John Paul II, 2003). As such one so designated and chosen from among the People of God becomes a priest, consecrated and set apart to mediate between the people and God, and to represent them before God. By this act he is also the ambassador of the divine redeemer and consecrated to the universal mission of the Church. (Ngwoke, 1998).

Finally, the priest as a diocesan clergy is different from the clerical Religious who take the sacred vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. The Church's legal tradition disposes that every cleric must be inscribed in that community or diocesan Church for whose services he was ordained. This is called incardination which comes with diaconate ordination for diocesan priests. Incardination is a juridical institution which gives the cleric a juridic title of rights and obligations in the local Church apart from that secured with baptism. It is also a means by which a concrete pastoral relationship of service and discipline is established between the cleric and the Church....Therefore unattached or transient clerics are not admitted. Hence, priests' incardinated in particular Church or diocese maintains ecclesial communion and canonical relationship with the diocese and to the personnel structure of authority of the Church, i.e. the diocesan Bishop under whose authority he exercises his ministry and enjoys the right of maintenance.

Okeke (1997) further opined that in this particular Church, the diocesan clergy apart from rights open to him as members of the Christ's faithful people, has in addition, Right to belong to the diocese; Right to autonomy of life (with attendant obligation to common life; belonging to the priestly family-the diocesan presbyterium; Right to Ecclesiastical Office and of course Right to adequate maintenance and social security.

## **Fundamental considerations in clergy personnel Administration**

### **The Nature of Ecclesiastical Offices**

The legislator drawing from the Second Vatican Council states that an ecclesiastical office is any post which by divine or ecclesiastical disposition is established in a stable manner to further a spiritual purpose (Pius XI, 1935). The elements discernable from this disposition include:

- ⊕ It is an office (not honorific title) that entails activity and accomplishing something in the name of Church and in accordance with law. It is equally an office open to all Christ's faithful by virtue of the indelible sacramental seal received from sacraments of baptism, confirmation and sacred orders.

- ⊖ It is constituted by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance and as such independent of interference from every political community.
- ⊖ It is stable both objectively in relation to the office and subjectively in relation to the titular or the person so designated. This stability may be indefinite, definite or at the prudent discretion of the competent authority who provides for the office. The person so designated should have delineated rights and obligations or job description and where it is delegated power should have the necessary ingredients for its exercise.
- ⊖ It has a unique finality, which is both the finality of the Church, which is salvation of souls that of the diocesan curia and juridic persons, which is spiritual/pastoral end. It should be directed always to the service of the mission of the Church.

Finally, ecclesiastical office is exercised always in communion with the Church, individually, collegially through designated organs of consultation. Finally the loss of office follows the provision of law either through the expiry of predetermined time or reaching the age limit defined by law, by resignation, by transfer, by removal, and by deprivation.

#### **Authority in Personnel Placement**

In the diocesan Church, the Bishop is the competent authority that provides for offices by free conferral. However, in some cases, the law requires that certain organs be consulted under the pain of invalidity according to canon 127 (e.g. consultation of the college of consultors and the Finance Council for the appointment of the financial administrator,) or certain persons recommended to be consulted as in the case of Dean for the appointment of parish priest, parish priest for the appointment of the parish vicar, priest within the deanery for the appointment of the dean.

Since this belongs to the executive power of Bishop, the diocesan Bishop accomplishes this duty through the assistance of the College of consultors, Episcopal Vicar for Clergy personnel and/or through an established clergy personnel department/commission.

#### **Procedures in Personnel Placement**

The legislator made both general and specific provisions for the requirements of different ecclesiastical offices in the diocesan Church. The diocesan Bishop as the one with the responsibility of making provision in the diocese should acquaint himself with these legislative dispositions.

It is always obtained by canonical provision, which is a valid administrative

juridical act that provides an established office with an incumbent. It should normally be made in writing, notarized with a specification of the competences or job description i.e. rights and obligations incumbent on the office holder.

The principle of appointing the right persons in office should guide his executive appointments i.e. ensuring that skilled, experienced, outstanding persons distinguished for their piety and pastoral zeal are nominated for offices. The Bishop should endeavor to know his priests i.e. their character, their aptitudes, their aspirations, the depth of their spiritual life, their zeal, their ideals, their state of health, their financial situation, their families and everything which concerns them. And he should know them not just in groups...or through pastoral bodies, but also individually and, as far as possible, in their place of ministry. This is the purpose of his pastoral visits, when as much time as possible should be given to personal matters.

For Nwangwu (1997):

This knowledge draws on the Bishop the charisms of discernment, discretion and prudence devoid of arbitrariness, prejudice and suspicion of favoritism or undue pressures, private interests or ethnic considerations in making ecclesiastical appointments. And worse still to fill the curia with people who are not responsible or suitable. (p. 3).

The Bishop should not burden an individual with many responsibilities especially where there are presences of many qualified personnel. This approach even helps the spiritual and interior life of the office holder so designated. Besides, when one person is invested with many responsibilities, there is always the risk of ending up not doing neither well i.e. "Jack of all trade and master of none.

### **Personnel Motivation and Discipline**

The issue of personnel motivation calls for equal treatment, reward of outstanding contribution, trust, support, recognition and respect of initiatives, talents and legitimate competences and responsible cooperation and frequent contacts among priests themselves. The officials should be motivated with enough delegated authority necessary to accomplish the demands of the office held.

Motivation also concerns adequate maintenance, that is, enough time for rest, off days, holidays and sabbatical leave as provided in law. It calls for remuneration for services rendered to the Church for the provision of necessities of life, honest livelihood and payment of needed services and social assistance and security at illness, incapacity, old age, resignation or even removal or imposed penalties.

This calls for the immediate establishment of the Institute for the Maintenance and Security of Priests.

The Bishop has the responsibility to draw the attention of the faithful in this regard and to be aware that the goods of the Church is directed to the maintenance of ecclesiastical workers. Establishing a common fund for this purpose is not out place in this project. The workers should be paid just wage for their maintenance and their dependents ( Donald, 1989).

Furthermore, the need for motivation calls for the formation and training which may be formal or informal. It involves a healthy introduction of the workers into the system of administration and a sort of apprenticeship. Ongoing formation is a right and a responsibility to clerics, Religious and for some other workers like catechists and even for the Bishops.

The officials of the diocesan curia are obliged to make promise of discharging their duties in fidelity to the diocesan Bishop and according to law. However, while most are obliged to make promise others like the Vicars, members of diocesan Synod, administrators of temporalities, (and for some also the members of the college of consultors) are obliged to take oath of fidelity and make profession of faith. The oath must also be taken by all who constitute or assist in tribunal.

The curia personnel are also bound by confidentiality within the limits and according to the manner determined by law and the diocesan Bishop. This obligation is highly demanded for all officials and in special mode those involved with diocesan archives and in general judicial officials. It is also demanded of consulting organs i.e. not to make public matters decided in the meetings as this is the prerogative of the Bishop. This is highly demanded for confessors, Canon Penitentiary, Interpreter of the seal of the sacrament of Reconciliation which is inviolable at the risk of censure.

The obligation to enforce laws within the local Church is the responsibility of the diocesan Bishop. He should therefore be vigilant to see that order, discipline and serenity reign in the curia/diocesan environment. This calls for prompt action and intervention with charity, yet firmly and decisively: whether through admonition or correction, or taking steps towards removal or transfer; and in some cases loss of juridical status, deprivation, suspension, dissolution or even inflicting just penalt and or in extreme circumstances initiating process of dismissal (John Paul 11, 2001). However the Bishop should endeavor:

- ⊖ To follow the legal procedures or due processes provided in law especially as regards removal, transfer and deprivation (can 196 &

canons of Book VI) and always conscious of the provision on the rights of the Christ's faithful in this regard.

- ⊖ To consider the provision for causes before action, that is, whether there exist just, grave, or proportionate reasons for action either of removal or transfer or penal remedy, etc.
- ⊖ To consider the term of appointment i.e. whether to be indeterminate, determinate or at the prudent discretion of Bishop (can 193).
- ⊖ To consider the obligation of consulting certain bodies (e.g. cann 1742; 1750; 485 etc.) before action of removal or transfer, before dissolution or suppression and approach all according to canonical equity (cann 221, §2; 1752) etc.
- ⊖ To take interest in justice and charity for sustenance of workers and the continued sustenance of those removed (can 195) or resigned or respect civil law provisions especially for laity (can 1286, 1<sup>o</sup>) and
- ⊖ To provide effective channels and means of resolving conflicts either amicably (cann 1446; 1676; 1659; 1695; 1713; 1733) or through arbitration (cann 1713-1716) or Committee (can 1733), or through administrative procedures and hierarchical recourse (cann 1400, §2; 1445, §2; 1732-1739). Thus the “credibility of diocesan governance may well rest on the extent to which it is sensitive to the rights of people in the diocese and is able to provide adequate protection for them not only within the diocese but within the wider Catholic communion.

### **Personnel Coordination**

The coordination of the curia will never become effective if the chains of command and channels of communication are not properly determined. This involves determining the required offices and organs; their competences and the communication links and interrelationships. This is called designing the organization diagram (i.e. ORGANIGRAM). On this Orchin (nd) said: “The organization of a society is determined by the form of its government, i.e. by the composition and functioning of the organs and persons which are entrusted with assuring of its direction” (p.3).

While taking note of this provision made for the secular organizations, we must underscore that they are relevant to the Church who “being an institution has structures which define the functional relationship and role assignments of people, be they clergy or laity who are within Church organizations We should not also forget that its application to the Church will be entirely unique because of the nature of the Church which is natural, supernatural and a society *sui generis* (can 204 §2).

The Bishop therefore should establish these offices and organs with their proper titles, competences (i.e. Job descriptions), and terms of offices. This should normally be articulated in a decree (can 145, §2); in writing (can 156) and notarized (can 474). It is good that all structures of the administration be assembled in a well articulated Statutes (cann 94-95) and Diocesan Handbook of Administration. This serves a lot of purposes for and in the local Church:

- ⊕ It is a demand of the principle seven of the revision of the new Code that called for clear distinction and delimitation of ecclesiastical structures. Also that of principle five that demanded the respect of principle of subsidiarity.
- ⊕ It helps to monitor discretions of power and control administrative arbitrariness. It puts everyone under the law and challenges all to the respect of those rights according to due processes (can 221). It helps to avoid conflicts, misunderstanding and mistrust within the administrative sector.
- ⊕ This serves effective function of enhanced communication in the diocese. Good communication is “the glue that holds structures and human relations together” and it is “organization in action”. Poor communication destroys the organization; it incapacitates it. Some Church administrators specialize in secrecy that is irrelevant and uncalled for. They hoard essential information to subordinates creating network of suspicion and red-tapism. On this Ubeku (1984) said:  
The workers do not become suspicious because they misunderstand the language in which the information is passed to them; they become suspicious because they are not told what is happening and therefore gather scraps of information through the grape vine. (p. 178).

And Okeke (1993) added:

The administrator should always adopt the most effective means of passing relevant information to other members of the organization in such a way that the information is clear, precise and intelligent. Important information should be communicated in writing. Information should be given well ahead of time. Information delayed is information denied and 'sitting on the file' when a person has applied for something is a form of administrative unkindness. This may breed frustration and resentment. Note the provisions of can. 57 and the obligations to repair any harm done by administrative silence (p. 13).

The communication we mean here can be formal or informal but should follow the required hierarchy in the Church organization. In addition, it is not in order to get a situation whereby subordinates are empowered to direct professionals or

those in the high offices of the Church. These demand that the required chains of command and channels of communications should be properly established and respected (Provost, 1983).

## **The Predicaments in Clergy Personnel Administration**

### **Aberrations in Personnel Placement**

We often observe the phenomenon of triumph of well known sycophants either with secretariat connections or friends to Consultors being placed in exalted offices. Cases of wrong and incompetent persons receiving or being favoured with offices of great responsibility abound. The aberrations may touch breach in procedure of transfers, removals, appointments, recalls that are punitive.

### **Lack of Healthy Further Education Policy**

A healthy further studies policy (involving the presbyterium in its formulation), and fidelity to its implementation is a necessity now in our local Churches. This policy should endeavour to determine what to study and the extent the individual can contribute to the local Church. An earlier plan and information of what one will do before going or on return will enhance better diocesan personnel management. The idea of “if you get opportunity you can go” is directly against the formal nature for further studies as directed by the Church. This is because if individual undertakes the arrangement of sponsorship it may tantamount to declaration of independence on the part of the priest. The normal thing should be that such arrangement should go through the diocesan bishop.

In addition, there is also need to reconsider the former practice of referring and requesting recommendations from the formators in the Major seminary who actually know the capability of their students for quite a long period of time. This is indeed a healthy ancilla for the diocesan Bishops' decisions for the priests among other considerations.

Again, the collaborators in the ministry of diocesan Bishop should endeavour to give their sincere advice (can 127, §3) based on the above principles so that the Bishop will not make costly mistakes in handling any of his priests that later leave bitter and lasting effects.

Finally we commend the efforts of our Bishops in this arduous task of their office because it is not always easy to manage the growing number of the diocesan priests.

## **Refusal to return after Further Education**

We have experienced in the midst of immense flourishing indigenous vocations to the priesthood, a corresponding increase in the number of diocesan priests that go for further studies either within the country or outside. This is made possible by the diocesan Church, the Missionary Decastery, and other local and foreign funding agencies and of course our families, communities and friends that have sustained the local Church in trained personnel.

However, the stories surrounding further education have been that of mixed feelings. Thus, when you calculate the enormous number of Nigerian Priests in some places like USA, Germany, Austria (the countries notable for permanent stay of priests), Rome, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, Holland, Nigeria etc. and the percentage of their return back home to assume and help the local Church one need to stop and reflect. The situation of longer stay is now creeping into those priests who study in Rome, Belgium, and even in Nigeria etc. What then could be the reasons for the refusal to return back to our country prevalent among some of us? Let us attempt a presentation of list to which you may add others.

- ⊖ Problem with research that is, in relation to materials, language and the Professors especially those who are known to make life difficult for their students. However, some priests delay the progress of their research or display lack of seriousness or commitment to a fruitful and speedy research work just for the purpose of prolonging their stay for possible economic benefits.
- ⊖ Problem with our families and the economic demands on the priests as new family breadwinners today. Our family situations, which are cultural, make multiple demands on the diocesan priests for assistance. This moves for extension of priest's obligation to charity to his immediate and extended family. It shows itself in sponsorship for business, for trip overseas, for erection of building in the family etc. This is really burdensome and creates distracted attention in the life of the diocesan secular priests. This calls for healthy social security and maintenance policy for the diocesan priests.
- ⊖ Problem with funding and the necessity to take up appointment or work in order to sustain the high standard of living and expensive education in some places. One may move to take loan to finish his studies with the desire to settle longer to raise money to pay such loans. This problem is also seen in the requirements of publication before one is awarded the doctorate degree. It demands money and time. Some in this context take to overstay as reason to accomplish this. Some are truly indigent that they

cannot make it unless they work. Some are abandoned by their Bishops to struggle personally.

- ⊕ Avowed interest in commerce and money since the environment offers better opportunity especially in the context of foreign exchange. This desire is seen not only in telling funny lies about the extreme poor situation of one's family or using the name of the diocese through the diocesan Bishop permission to raise some funds (the final destination of which is normally the individual's personal account) but also, on the constant visit overseas during holidays for those who dared to return and have taken assignments at home (not for research mainly but monetary benefits). One Bishop observed in this regard thus: “the impression I get is that many of you came into the priesthood because it is the only avenue for you to travel to Europe or America. This view is supported by the fact that some who are doing nothing whatsoever with their much desired and acquired degrees harass me yearly for permission to travel to Europe for holidays. No wonder then that those who have not gone wish and insist they must study in Europe or America so that they may make contacts and open avenues for personal revenues. To study is not really their pre-occupation. This evaluation is very true of other priests in other dioceses” Obiefuna (nd). The Council Fathers decreed: **“So they are not to regard an ecclesiastical office as a source of profit, and are not to spend the income accruing from it for increasing their own private fortunes. Hence priests, far from setting their hearts on riches, must always avoid all avarice and carefully refrain from all appearance of trafficking” (Can 286).**
- ⊕ One prefers periodic home visitation rather than permanent return home with the impression that there is nothing to do at home especially in the midst of the so called “vocation boom”. So often you will get these expressions “why are you going or rushing to go home?” “What are you going to do if you return?” Did you not see the experience of this or other person that returned where he was assigned for apostolate? They are good at creating offices that have no portfolios. The environment at home seems unreceptive. In addition to this is that, some priests at home have established their cathedra in many places and offices making it impossible to admit new intakes, innovations or any meaningful changes in such pastoral sectors. Some of them regret always when there are more ordinations or new priests returning home who may be more qualified to take up their positions. These attitudes on both sides tend to sustain the problem of return from further studies unabated.
- ⊕ Overstay and loss of bearing from ones root and local Church where he is incardinated and brought up breed alienation. The joy of staying at home is lost to extraordinary effort to live like the westerners in all departments

of life bereft of their roots. This is immaturity, which hinders the priest from experiencing a profound sense of belonging to or being identified with his society. Even in the midst of all material wealth (showing itself in houses, cars, business etc), academic degrees, revenue connections, inappropriate relationship with women etc still you witness “more regressive path of apathy toward ministry that smacks of passive aggression or that of antisocial recklessness with their ministry and life.” This leads to loss of vision of one's mission and that of the Church. For some with “Green Card”, “*Carta Soggiorno*” or “Citizenship”, the loss of one's roots and independence from the local ordinaries is declared. But to what extent does this alienation brings joy and happiness to the individual is our concern. Somebody said to me one day how he visited a priest who have been in USA for over twenty years and saw nothing that attracts anyone neither in his person nor in the house he apparently owns and lives in. With these number of years one wonders what the individual will contribute to his local Church on return especially when he will be nearing retiring age on return (can 538) and worse still some die in foreign land.

- ⊕ One may be annoyed either with the system who has failed to understand and consent to his agenda which in most cases is contrary to the mission of the Church or the fact that he was not earlier allowed to go for studies on time, or do the course or go to the place of his choice. The inability to receive the necessary documents (like Bishop's authority letters, celebret etc) and financial support breeds greater annoyance not only to the diocesan Bishop, his collaborators but all persons of the local Church. In most cases he hides his identity and address at overseas, breaks communication with all and sneaks in, because he does not want to be seen by anybody nor his being around to be publicized.
- ⊕ As a follow up, some who are overstaying their study leave or are unwilling to go back home after studies are often recounting stories of woes, of victimizations or perceived injustice received on the part of their Bishops before they finally “escaped for “ studies: punitive transfers, lack of appreciation of sincere pastoral efforts etc. The desire to quickly complete study and return home is not awakened in them for fear of meeting the same or worse fate. Their success to secure an opportunity for further studies abroad has been taken as escapism and asking them to go back is like watering a dead stake. For some, resolution is, “unless that man (referring to their Bishop) dies or is retired, it is bye to their dioceses”. May be they are right in their perceived fear, may be they have also over reacted. But it is point for the individual Bishops to meditate upon. This paper cannot but advise them to make it green for them at home and they will not be out to the fields.

- ⊖ The other problem is the scandalous waste of time and fund especially where the individual do no struggle for his sponsorship. The other is where one believes that the importance of his studies is simply to pass the periodic semester examination. He studies mainly for examination and wastes the rest of the period in moving from place to place or getting attached to a parish where in most cases one receive embarrassing experience of modern dimension of slavery and neo-colonialism from those who are supposed to be our brothers in the same catholic Priesthood. One needs to recount experiences from our assistances during Christmas, Easter and Long vacation. Still other who have the charisma of discoveries spend the major part of their time in internet not in research mainly but in navigating, writing questionable letters and in most cases getting information of places to write letters for apostolate in Europe and America with the normal response “we are sorry, we have no place”. The individual in most cases is caught up in this quagmire and could not finish the research which in most cases is hurriedly done, wanting in depth, profundity and casting doubts on the supposed professional knowledge in the area of one's specialization and the expected contributions on return.
- ⊖ The diocesan Bishop could give tacit endorsement to this long stay not solely on the bases of reconciling the individual to the local Church but because the individual in question makes financial contribution to the Bishop, who stays in his place always while in trips overseas. The person believes this is the way through which the local Church can give him little peace to live his life as he has projected. Furthermore, experiences showed that the originators of this unhealthy attitude of not returning on schedule were among the group considered to be among the best. But it was all disappointment calling for serious review of the statutes and fidelity to its genuine implementation. This is equally unfortunate.

Finally, for us brethren, genuine and true some of the above reasons may be, there is still no place for self-deception and self contradiction, since things are not alright. Rahner (1992) warned and exhorted:

We can “sugar over the devil himself” by the ingenuity with which we put a face of goodness on our wickedness, so as to deceive not only others but even ourselves. This ingenuity reaches to the very principles of moral judgment, which we either blissfully ignore altogether, or set aside in favour of more “enlightened” standards of conduct formulated by ourselves. A stage is quickly reached when our consciences devise a kind of personal alchemy by which sin and perverse behaviour are transformed into virtue and righteousness.(pp. 118-119).

This should not be the case as Pope John Paul II (1982) observed:

Nigerians love to study. This is good. Learned priests are required in order to answer the needs of Church and society. Every priest should continue to improve himself by the private study of theology, catechetics and other such sacred sciences. Strive to make time for some such study frequently. When you are ordained and it is a question of going to universities or similar institutes inside or outside Nigeria, this is an assignment to be given only to a certain number of priests, according to diocesan needs and planning, for which the Bishops take ultimate responsibility. Do nothing without your Bishop or worse still against him, especially on this point. Priests who have already put themselves into such irregular positions can now retrace their steps and find peace of conscience. In the same way, you will resist the temptation to seek employment anywhere without or against your Bishop. We all share in Christ's one priesthood. Let us maintain its unity and love. (p. 9).

Furthermore, in the context of the individual development, it should not be always through formal further education but also through ongoing formation provided within the local Church as the Congregation for the Clergy directed: Such (ongoing) formation must cover and harmonize all the dimensions of the formation of priests. Thus, it must tend to help each priest achieve the development of a full human personality nurtured in the spirit of service to others, in whatever task he may receive; it will permit him to be intellectually prepared in the theological sciences as well as in the human sciences in so far as they are linked with his ministry in order to pursue his function as witness to the faith and with a greater effectiveness.

Regrettably in our own context, for some priests, private or ongoing program of studies is out of question. They neglect personal studies. They ignore diocesan pastoral courses, seminars, workshops and theological conferences. They read only newspapers and junk magazines and spend their time collecting and watching videos of questionable inspirational values. They keep friends who will discuss everything but serious theological and intellectually stimulating issues. They believe that further studies will be meaningful only in formal university education programs (Okeke, 1998).

### **Strained Relationship between Bishops and Priests**

Okeke (1999) observed that this is seen in areas of placements, transfers and deprivation of offices, further studies and recalls; in exhortations and reprimands and in maintenance/social security. As the numbers of the diocesan presbyterium are daily on increase, the Bishop is also daily challenged to discernment and

attention to the growth of his priests. The talents which are gifts from God should be identified, appreciated, willingly acknowledged (not grudgingly tolerated) and given every opportunity for constructive uses... for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The Bishop, in exercising his ministry should try to relate with his priests, *not merely as a ruler towards his subjects, but rather as a father and a friend. He should devote himself wholeheartedly to creating a climate of affection and trust such that his priests may respond with a convinced, pleasing and firm obedience. The practice of obedience is strengthened rather than weakened if the Bishop, as far as possibly and without prejudice to justice and charity, explains to the interested parties the reasons for his decisions. He should show equal care and attention to every priest, because all of them, while their gifts will be many and varied, are engaged in the service of the Lord as members of a single presbyterate.* (Paul iv, 1967).

*The priest on the other hand should acknowledge the authority of the Bishop and accept him not merely as the chief executive but more as a father and mentor.*

### **Failed Priestly Fraternity/ Solidarity**

We observe within the diocesan Church different levels of strained relationships or failed fraternities or conflicts among clergy. These include: Priests and Priests (i.e. curial officials and priests; parish Priests and Parish Vicars; Parish Priests and Priests in Residence); Priests and Religious; Priests and Laity or Parish Publics/communities etc.

Reasons for such include unhealthy image of one another i.e. unhealthy images and misconceptions that affect the identity, status, attitudes towards one another; evidences of pride, ambition, greed, envy, hatred, lack of respect; presence of emotional immaturity and complexes or exhibition of wounded self; connection with the powers that be or struggle over power; display of materialism, fame, money, cars; ministerial activities beyond one's territory i.e. intrusion without permission; observed conflicts in competences especially in demands related to rights and benefits; evidence of growing discord, conflicts and litigations among priests living together as the noble edifice of fraternity is eroded by fight of personal egos/individualism/selfishness and as some engage in intrigues and character assassination that remain a scandal to the people of God in the parish and beyond; or unhealthy and irresponsible relationship with women in the rectory or flooding of the rectory with friends and family relatives at the neglect of other priests; and generation gaps. Okafor (2001) observed thus:

In the recent past it used to be a luxury for two priests to live together in a presbytery. It was a privilege reserved to elderly priests and priests with

multiple assignments. Nowadays, it is common to have two or more priests living in many parishes. What can cause the breach of peace among priests living together? The encapsulated answer is: Selfishness. It could be selfishness on the part of one, or both or all of them. The atmosphere created by selfishness makes it possible for them to catalogue the offences of one against the other. This is because it is impossible for a selfish man to forgive and not count the cost. In some instances where a priest lives alone, he still succeeds in keeping himself sad by inflicting his selfishness on the society around him. Thus he quarrels with the Seminarian, Cook, Typist, Steward, Catechist, Readers, Mass Servers, Church Wardens, Parish Council etc. Such people must locate an escape goat for their anger all the time. Such ugly situations should no longer be found among us. Let us jettison selfishness out of the windows of our lives and breathe the fresh air of forgiveness, justice and peace. (p. 2).

Some parish priests adopt either a laissez fair or despotic/high handed style of leadership. For some there is no forum for communication, pastoral planning/programming/schedules and dialogue for fraternity/common life in some rectories. There is no division of labour and trust among priests living together. The Parish Vicars should not be seen as glorified houseboys at the hands of the parish priests. They are priests in their own standing and part and parcel of the mission and ministry of the Church. We also observed that some parish priests when they have cause to go on leave or stay outside the parish for a while normally hand over the parish administration to a visiting priest other than the other priests with them. In some cases such visiting priests are highly remunerated and attended to more than those directly involved in parish ministry or residing in the rectory.

What do we say of those who are unconcerned with the welfare of their brother priests, i.e. his feeding, Medicare, car maintenance, house equipments, gifts etc?; or one that feel threatened because his colleagues preaches better homilies or appreciated by the community; or one that exhibits intimidating character that does not accommodate or tolerate the other?; or one soaked with jealousies against the achievements and progress of the other?; or exhibits insincerity in making monetary demands etc? In effect how do we manage the differences in our personality and character? How do we accommodate one another in the spirit of the gospel and as a reflection of our true identity as servants of the gospel?

## Questionable life Style

St Paul exhorted the Romans thus:

And if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. (Romans 2: 19-24).

Paul's exhortation to the Romans should be enough challenge to the diocesan clergy in the midst of evident dichotomy between the word we preach and the lives that we live. An adage holds that “action speaks louder than words” and “I cannot hear you because what you are speaks louder.” This is a call for self examination which the Bishops of Onitsha and Owerri provinces re-interated in their 1999 document on *The Igbo Catholic Priest at the Threshold of the Third Millennium: “Self Examination, Challenges and Expectations* and represented in an extraordinary research by Revd Fr Collins Okeke in his 2006 publication titled. *The Future of the Catholic Priesthood in Igboland: Dangers and Challenges Ahead*.

Both books called our attention to reflections and challenges to personal integration and openness to the demands of our call since “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers, it is because they are witnesses and the faithful draw great encouragement from the example and witness of the priest. Continuing the Bishops of Nigeria advised that Priests should strive earnestly to always match their words with their actions. Their lives should be gospels that people can read. An individual priest's life may well turn out to be the first gospel that some people will read or may be even the only gospel that they will ever read.

Why we are not concerned about the impact of our lives which is the lived Gospel and our words on our community? Why do we not see that we have steadily increased the membership of other Christian denominations either because of our actions and inactions? Do you wallow in the mentality of great statics of those that flood the Sunday Masses or the size of such Sunday offertory collections instead of being concerned about their desire for our ultimate goal? Are we among those who after annoying the people of God through our scandalous lives or abusive messages from the pulpit say “*otu Onitsha amaro n'ofu onye abiaro ahia*”?

In effect, therefore, we as physicians to the souls of our communities are invited to heal ourselves (Luke 4:23) and to resist scandal (Rom 2:24) to the faith community we are called to serve and upon whom we depend for our maintenance. The diocesan Bishop added, as priests, we are light which the people look upon as model for their moral and spiritual life, especially in our decadent Nigeria today (Okafor, 2006). Thus to accomplish so great a task of preaching the Word of God, we should adhere to the above exhortation of Paul to the Romans and the Bishops on eloquence of our lives as basis for the fruitful realization of the word of God in our midst. Smith (cited in Okafor, 2006) said:

We must begin by purifying ourselves before we purify others, we must be instructed to be able to instruct others, we must become light to illuminate others, we must draw close to God to bring God close to others; we must be sanctified to sanctify and lead by the hand and counsel prudently. (p. 4).

### **Conclusion: Brothers what shall we do?**

The question of the first converts to faith on Pentecost will be the point of departure for the conclusion of our presentation. As priests consecrated for the Lord and the Church, we should readjust ourselves and comportment so that it will correspond to our identity and our invitation to service for the good of our local Church since administrative office and power is ministerial, imitating Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many (Mark 10,45; Matt 20, 25-28; Luke 22,27; John 10, 1-17; 13, 1-17; 21, 15-17). There is no place for absolutism or dictatorship but rather solicitude and service (1 Pet 5, 1-4; Matt 20, 25-28; 1Cor 4, 1-6) (Hill, 1988). The Fathers of the Council advised that the office, however which the Lord committed to pastors of his people is in strict sense of the term, a service which is called in sacred scripture a 'diakonia' or ministry (Acts 1, 17; 21, 19; Rom 11, 13; 1 Tim 1, 12). It is on this note that we present these challenges necessary for the achievement of our integrity before the people of God.

### **The Challenge of Internalized/Personalized Priestly Identity**

In our desire to accomplish the challenges of priestly service, we believe that priests should make a journey through the self by appreciating our identity and personalizing our vocation. According to Okeke (2001):

To be responsible for one's vocation entails personalizing one's vocation. Personalization is a continuous process and entails having a clearer vision of the vocation itself, the dismantling of false expectations

associated with it, and the overcoming of illusions about oneself. But the ground of that personalization remains the rediscovery and acceptance of God's unconditional love for us as individuals and as a Church. (p. 21).

We believe that a mature personality will definitely enhance mature interpersonal relationship which we are called to exhibit among ourselves. But to accomplish this, the Church calls on clerics to ongoing formation which continues throughout one's life time.

### **The Challenge to Diocesan Leadership and Priests**

It is a simple truth that no organization can function effectively without good leadership. In our context as already presented, the diocesan leadership rests squarely on the diocesan Bishop. It is his responsibility to coordinate and direct the affairs of this portion of the people of God towards the finality of the Church-salvation of souls. The way and manner he directs the affairs of the local Church remain desiderata to the amount of loyalty and cooperation he will get from both the faithful and especially his immediate cooperators-the diocesan clergy. On this note his exercise of authority as service becomes paramount. The diocesan bishop is bound to create the enabling environment that will foster this relationship among priests in his leadership styles especially in personnel placement, further studies, maintenance etc. On this note he should exercise his authority, and show charisms of discernment, discretion and prudence in his dealings and especially in his personal knowledge of his priests. As the number of priests in each diocesan presbyterium increases, the Bishop is also challenged to see that their talents which are gifts from God should be identified, appreciated, willingly acknowledged (not grudgingly tolerated) and given every opportunity for constructive uses... for the glory of God and the salvation of souls (Okolo, 1991).

In addition to this his discerning charisma, discretion and prudence should be manifested in his personal knowledge of his priests, that is, their character, their aptitudes, their aspirations, the depth of their spiritual life, their zeal, their ideals, their state of health, their financial situation, their families and everything which concerns them. And he should know them not just in group or through pastoral bodies, but also individually and, as far as possible, in their place of ministry. This is the purpose of his pastoral visits, when as much time as possible should be given to personal matters.

The fact that these sons (i.e. diocesan priests) of the Bishops are not returning early or not interested in returning or eager to move out, call for deeper self-examination on the part of the diocesan leadership. The legislator called the

Bishop's attention to solicitude to the welfare and predicaments of his priests in these words; he is to have a special concern for the priests, to whom he is to listen as his helpers and counselors. He is to defend their rights and ensure that they fulfill the obligations proper to their state. He is to see that they have the means and the institutions needed for the development of their spiritual and intellectual life. He is to ensure that they are provided with adequate means of livelihood and social welfare, in accordance with the law.

For the diocesan priests, they are called in obedience to collaborate with the bishops in a spirit of loyal and sincere communion, being ready always to accept transfers, and the invitation to return to take up assignments at home. The local Church has concern for them, and she waits for their prompt return to continue the mission of Christ the redeemer, which is "far from being completed. Their contribution is required in the area of both the society and the Church, in the seminaries, diocesan curia and parishes etc.

### **The Challenge of Healthy Interpersonal Relationship**

The priests should reach out in healthy interpersonal relationships with both his bishops and other priests. Reminding the priests of the need for a sense of the Presbyterium and friendship the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria instructed: The priest maintains and fosters a spirit of fraternity, solidarity, friendship, and special hospitality to his brother priests who are often alone, tired and exhausted. He spends time and recreation with his fellow priests. If possible, there is a guest room in the priest's house, ready to warmly receive visiting priests. If he is aware of a priest in difficulty or temptation, a priest that is too much and too often on his own, he reaches out to support, assist and possibly challenge that priest. If need be, he elicits the support and help of the Bishop in assisting that priest.

Complimenting, the Congregation for the Evangelization of People, it should be added that priests should try to have relations of real friendship with their fellow priests, being able in this way to help each other more easily to develop their spiritual and intellectual live, to give assistance in material needs, and to live more fully and more serenely. This type of friendship between priests, developed in Christ as a consequence of each one's personal communion with Him, is of great help in overcoming the difficulties of loneliness.

### **The Challenge of Community life**

Community life should show itself as the next challenge for priestly fraternity especially for priests living in the same rectory, within the same town with multi-

parishes, in the same vicinity (that is in deaneries and regions). Committed participation in associations of priests, seminars, retreats, workshops, conferences, organs of administration, committees, recreational activities and celebrations at the diocesan, regional, deanery and parish levels are sine qua non to enhancing and fostering priestly fraternity, fraternal solidarity and collaboration as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples rightly opined: Community life, based on the one priesthood and as an expression of fraternity, is strongly recommended by the Church for diocesan priests. It favours joint apostolic work and especially first evangelization, which experience has shown to be difficult if undertaken by individuals. Bishops should study, therefore, how to promote community life, according to the possibilities available and the models offered by local culture, trying to overcome understandable organizational difficulties and possibly some psychological reticence. It should be remembered that community life cannot be improvised but requires sensitization and preparation already in the seminary.

There should be time for dialogue and review of pastoral programmes; time for common prayers/con-celebrations at Masses; at least one common meal; effective communications of feelings and sentiments etc. In essence, there is obligatory need to have regular and formal business meetings (discussions during meals or during recreations are inadequate). Community life means not merely living physically together but sharing on the spiritual, pastoral and human levels. Thus, priests who form a community should pray together; they should exchange useful information and plan and evaluate together their apostolic activities; they should help each other in cultural updating; they should help each other financially, even having to some extent their goods in common, according to the bishop's guidelines; they should willingly take recreation together; they should help and encourage each other in difficult situations, in times of weariness or illness, and especially when problems with one's vocation arise; when necessary, they should not be afraid to give fraternal advice.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, brother priests, “fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration” (Phil 4, 8), and if our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your conviction and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make one completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit, but everybody is to be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds, you must be the same as Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:1-50)

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