

Brief History of Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community

Following migration to the United States of America from all over the world, many ethnic groups including those from Nigeria, have found it spiritually enriching to establish native church communities where they can experience liturgical worship in ways that are consistent and meaningful to their native experience of church. Such immigrant church communities are known to serve as avenues for community building, experiencing togetherness, overcoming cultural isolation, and providing a stronghold for advocacy programs that help children of immigrants and their families. Recent trends in migration have shown an increase in the number of parents coming to stay with the budding families of their children. Many of these grandparents have expressed that attending regular mass at the local parishes is not spiritually as uplifting as they experience back home. The isolative nature of their environment coupled with language difficulties makes appreciating the celebration of holy mass in that setting very difficult.

Our burning desire to have a Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community (NICC) grew following the establishment of a 'Catholic Prayer Ministry of the Holy Spirit' in Baltimore in the 1995 by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Edeh, an evangelical catholic priest. It was in 1996 that a group of us in the Prayer Ministry along with Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Paul Anekwe, initiated a move for us to start offering Igbo Mass as a means of establishing a spiritual community for our people. We started offering Igbo Mass at Church of the Little Flower in Baltimore, a worshipping space we were blessed to have through Fr. Paul Anekwe who became our premier priest. The Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community was officially born with the formation of the first coordinating council and election of Aloysius Ibe and Dr. Bert Ekeocha, as the premier chairman and vice chairman, respectively. In 1997, we moved to our present worship site, St. Mathew Catholic Church in Baltimore, a multicultural parish pastured by Rev. Fr. Joseph Muth, Jr.

In 1998, we wrote His Eminence, William Cardinal Keeler, the Archbishop of Baltimore, requesting the formal establishment of the Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community in response to the spiritual needs of our people within the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In 2005, the Archdiocese of Baltimore formally granted us official status and the Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community was

included in the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) official Catholic directory. Encouraged by this official recognition by the Archdiocese, we committed ourselves to building a vibrant religious community where faith and catholic tradition in ministering to the spiritual and communal needs of our people was the primary focus. In all these efforts, the Lord has continued to guide us through difficult times, allowing his light to shine through moments of darkness and blessed us with significant growth in membership and robust church attendance.

Currently, we celebrate our Igbo mass on the last Sunday of every month. Our vision is to attain a parish status with a permanent Igbo-speaking priest to minister to us and to expand our monthly mass services to biweekly. The NICC Women Wing is presently at its formative stage and we hope to use this medium as a springboard to offer our women strong spiritual formation and social enrichment. We are presently engaged in developing a curriculum for the cultural and religious enrichment of our children. We plan to educate our children on the geography of Nigeria, its sociopolitical history and development, cultural linguistic aspects, and grounding in the basic language and culture of the Igbo people. We intend to incorporate into this program a formal catechesis for the religious education of our children.

In a very special way, we thank Fr. Paul Anekwe who supported the initial idea of our forming this catholic community and express our appreciation to him and all the other Igbo-speaking priests, Fr. Tony Nwachukwu-Udaku, Fr. Desmond Ohankwere, Monsignor Felix Ojimba, Fr. Illokaba, Fr. Anselm Nworgu, Fr. Ferdinand Madu, Fr. Anyanwu, Fr. Abiamiri, Fr. Cyril Nwankwo, Fr. Camillus Ugwu, Fr. Nelson Ogwuegbu, and Fr. Ugwuegbulem who devoted their time to minister to our people.