MSP Mission in Chad
Come and See!

The diocese of Sarh in Southern Chad where the MSP have ministered for more than a decade has as its motto: Come and See! I heard this summon, and off I went in November 2009. The journey to this often forgotten African country was both exciting and challenging. The images that dance in peoples heads when they hear the name Chad, are often of wars, famine, hunger and poverty. A landlocked country of barely 10 million people with a land mass of more than a million square metres, every Chadian ought to be a wealthy land owner. But most of this wide expanse of land is either deserts or mountains. Yes, there were signs of material poverty everywhere. But I also met a people who like any in other parts of the world, worked hard to improve their lots in life. I encountered a people of faith and hope. I experienced a well organized church community.

The missionary in Chad must like Venerable Charles de Foucauld of the Little Brothers of Jesus, carry out his work mostly in anonymity. He must in many ways become like the people in order to effectively witness the gospel of Jesus Christ. He must abandon any hope of recognition or adulation. I did experience a spiritual paradigm shift during my trip. I left with more questions than answers. What is the staying strength of these people in spite of having so little material wealth? How do many of them manage to smile with an empty stomach? Why do they not have grandiose dreams and ambitions? Why is no one interested in driving a big car or building a big house? Their seeming contentment in spite of so much lack felt irritating.

My lasting impression of Chad is that the strength of a society or community does not necessarily depend on its material wealth. While visitors ache over what they see as the material lack of the people, one is struck by the spirit of contentment that fills the life of the average Chadian. They are content to take each day as it comes. They are devoid of that primitive acquisitiveness that is the bane of many affluent societies. For most of them, being is better than having. The report of this trip is contained in this edition. The journey was made possible through the generous contributions of the Associate Members of the Missionary Society of St Paul, St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, Okokomaiko, Nigeria, and a few other individuals who have chosen to remain anonymous. May God bless and reward you all abundantly. My sincere thanks to the MSP Community in Chad who proved to be excelled hosts.

Happy reading!

P. Ebito Akekpe, msp
ebitoa@yahoo.com
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Missionary Society of St Paul
Gwagwalada, Abuja & Iperu-Remo, Ogun State.
Admissions 2011

Requirements:
Age: 17-25 years (Graduates, NCE holders, etc. may be older)
Academic Qualifications: Minimum of 5 credits, including English, in GCE/SSCE
Testimonials: From parish priest, principals of schools/employers
Personal Qualities: Strong faith, love of Jesus Christ, love of people and Good health.

Handwritten Application should be sent between November & December to:
The Revd Vocations Director
Missionary Society of St Paul
P. M. B. 2011, Iperu-Remo 121003, Ogun State.
E-mail: mspvocations@yahoo.com  Website: www.mspfathers.org
Motto: “We are Ambassadors for Christ”.
Please enclose stamped self addressed envelope for reply
For reasons of cost and personnel, MSP only admits candidates resident in Nigeria to its seminary

Vocations Director
08029968777
Letters to the Editor

In reading a past issue of The Catholic Ambassador, (Volume 26 Number 4, October 2009) I was taken back when I read the following in an article written by Reverend John Anih, MSP. “It has not been easy too balancing the prudent attitude of an average Irish towards a black priest to the warmth, friendship and genuinely Christian and human love that these Africans show me.”

I can relate to the feelings of warmth, friendship and love that Fr. Anih clearly feels from the African people in his midst as I too have experienced the same during my years working with the MSP priests in our parish in New York. I would caution him however not to let his generalizations about the Irish progress towards a claim of superiority which one could possibly read into the contrast painted by him in the article.

As an international publication being distributed in many foreign countries, please realize that many different racial, ethnic and cultural groups have access to and read this publication. Perhaps the article is a true reflection of his experience with the Irish however I fail to see how publishing a statement like this would do anything more than aggravate the situation when read by the Irish community in which Fr. Anih is serving.

Cheryl Duda
Yonkers, New York

I would like to say a big thank you for the good work you are doing for the Nigerian Catholic Church. More grease to your elbows. We love buying your Ambassador Calendar for each of our community every year. But for the past four years you have removed the congregation of the Little Sisters of Jesus from your vocation guide in the calendar. Please make every effort to see that we are adequately represented in your next year’s calendar. May the good Lord continue to bless you all as you seek to meet the spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters in the Lord.

L. Sr. Ngozi Okoye
Isuaniocha, Nigeria

We pray for your sacred ministry knowing that you hold a Sacred power to intercede for all of us who need so much grace to do God’s will.

Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate,
Umuahia

Thank you ever so much for the last edition of the Ambassador sent to us. Keep up the good work.

Sr. Juliana Osiyemi, EIJ
Lagos

Unsolicited articles, reports, and photographs are welcome, but not returnable. Comments about materials published in the magazine are also welcome. Letters to the Editor should be brief. They may be edited for clarity and space. All comments and suggestions must always be made in WRITING.
The symbolic invocation of ash on our forehead at the beginning of our Lenten observance was a graphic proclamation of our call to conversion. The programme for this path of repentance is the evangelical virtues of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, given in the gospel reading of Ash Wednesday from Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew Chapter 5. These weapons of our Lenten struggle are needed to fight the enemies of our soul which the penny catechism teaches us to be the devil, the world and the self. The teaching of the catechism emphasizes that of these three enemies of the soul, the greatest of them is the self. Hence the presentation of the temptations of our Lord in the first Sunday of Lent was to show us the various ways the inclinations of the self leads us to sin. It is St. John that summarized these inclinations of the self in his First Epistle as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. (2:16), Christ’s defeat of the temptations that the devil wanted to capitalize on through these inclinations is an invitation to us to also be ready to overcome the temptations that come our way. But what is the goal of this call to conversion? What is the benefit of this struggle? Are we also beginning to wonder like St. Peter; “Do we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?” (Matt. 19:27). The theme of the Second Sunday of Lent with the Transfiguration of our Lord reminds us that heaven is our goal. The fruit of the evangelical virtues is eternal life. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving which are done in secret come from thanksgiving and appreciation to God for his mercy since our salvation entirely depends on the grace of God. Hence the motivating instinct of our whole hearted response to our call to ongoing conversion must come from a desire to place any obstacle in the workings of grace in our soul: Do you suppose that these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will also perish as they did. This is the imperative call to conversion in the Third Sunday of Lent of the liturgical Year C from the words according to the gospel tradition of St. Luke (13: 2-3). The more we go close to God, the more we realize that salvation is the working of grace. We are all in need of this grace. The fourth Sunday of Lent therefore reminds us that we are either like the Prodigal Son who leaves the presence of God to misuse the undeserved gifts he has given to us or like the elder brother who wants to exclude themselves from the house of God our Father out of a posited-self-righteousness or a too human way of thinking. Greater trust in the grace of God which ought to be the fruit of our Lenten observance means every now and then coming back to our senses (Lk. 15:17). One of the unmistakable signs of this realization of the total dependence on grace for our salvation is compassion for others. And so, Let him who thinks he is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7). This radical call to compassion for others as a fruit of conversion is the thrust of the Fifth Sunday of Lent which is last Sunday before Holy Week. It is the growth and conversion we must attain to meaningfully enter into the passion of our Lord on Palm Sunday. We need it to purify our minds to be able to share in the sacrificial and brotherly meal of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday. It is those who are therefore ready to lay down their lives for their brothers that can die with the Lord on Good Friday. To die with the Lord is to live. The transition of the Easter Triduum ends in the victory song of the Exultet. Our enthusiastic singing of the Gloria becomes a launching pad to the acclamation of the Alleluia which can only be meaningful from the prayer, fasting and almsgiving that has been done in secret. The glory of Easter is shaped from our Lenten observance.

Fr. Amadasu, a priest of the Archdiocese of Benin City, Nigeria, is currently studying at the Catholic University, Louvain, Belgium.
In spite of being a yearly celebration, every Open and Thanksgiving Day is not without its frills and thrills. This year’s was not different.

Beginning from Friday January 29, AMSP had started arriving from various parts of the country. When the liturgical celebrations began at 10am on Sunday 31st the entire premises of the Missionary Society of St Paul Formation House Iperu-Remo had taken on the atmosphere of a carnival. Men and women decked in the uniform of the Associate Members thronged the venue of the mass in large numbers. Faces glowed with joy savouring the benefits of this yearly re-union.

The chief celebrant of the mass was His Grace Archbishop John Onaiyekan, the Archbishop of Abuja and the Ordinary of the Missionary Society of St Paul of Nigeria. He anchored his homily on the theme of the Sunday which was love. According to him none of our gifts meant anything to God if we had no love. He complained about the so many ‘holy noises’ we hear all around us in the country, yet very little love circulated around. The MSP in the view of Archbishop Onaiyekan, had helped to boost not only the image of the Church in Nigeria but also that of Nigeria as a nation. In his words, “it is not enough to be proud of the MSP as Nigerians; we must be ready to support them. Parishes and dioceses must key the needs of our missionaries into their budgets. We should not turn our missionaries into international beggars.”

Funds were raised through open donations and a bazaar. Money realized will be channeled into building a priests’ residence in the Society’s headquarters in Kutunku, Abuja.

The visit of the “Three Wise Women from the West” to places where MSP are working in Nigeria in 2008 created a deep impression in the hearts of the women. Their stories led the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul in Houston to think of ways to support the efforts of the MSP in Nigeria. One of the ladies, Ms. Lois Coleman, suggested we organize a walk-a-thon to raise funds for the educational needs of the children in MSP missions. This suggestion was accepted at the AMSP meeting in May 2009. After much planning the first annual “Walk 4 the Mission” was held on January 30, 2010 at Tom Bass Park in Houston. Even though it was a very cold morning, the event attracted close to 100 participants each walking with a warm heart. It is the hope of the organizers that the next event will draw more people from the various parishes in Houston and beyond. After the event, Mrs. Bea Cunningham commented that she was excited that many people came out to walk for the mission. All the participants are looking forward to walk again next year though many hope that it would be held after the winter.
The Associate Missionaries of St. Paul (AMSP) is gradually taking root in the MSP parishes and beyond in the archdiocese of Galveston/Houston. Twenty AMSP members took their solemn admission on January 24, 2010 at St. Anne de Beaupre Church in Houston. The ceremony was held within the Sunday Mass presided over by the Auxiliary Bishop Joe Vasquez. In his homily, the bishop reminded the congregation that St. Paul the great apostle did not do the mission work alone but rather collaborated with many lay persons. Following the footsteps of their patron, the Missionary Society of St. Paul is also working closely with lay missionaries around the world. He thanked the new AMSP and invited them to use their talents and gifts to support the work of the Missionary Society of St. Paul. After the homily, the director of the mission development office in Houston, Fr. Felix Ilesanmi Osasona, MSP called each AMSP by name and they took their solemn admission in the presence of the mission superior, Very Rev. Fr. Desmond Ohankwere, MSP, Fr. Oliver Obele, MSP (pastor of St. Anne de Beaupre), and Fr. Aloysius Nzekwe, MSP (Assistant Director of the Mission Development Office). Bishop Joe Vasquez had since been named and installed the 5th Bishop of Austin Diocese. The first formal celebration of solemn admission took place in January 2007 at St. Peter the Apostle Church, Houston. The second one took place on January 25, 2009 at St. Philip Neri Church, Houston. Also on January 24, 2010, 13 members of St. Benedict the Moor Church in Savannah diocese, Georgia, took their solemn admission to be Associate Missionaries of St. Paul. Fr. Christian Alimaji, MSP, the pastor of St. Benedict the Moor urged the new associates to join the rest of the members world-wide to pray for the MSP and their work, encourage vocations, and imitate the spirit of St. Paul using their time, talent and treasure.
The groundwork for the coming of the MSP to Chad began in 1995. That year, Bishop Edmund Djitaangar of the diocese of Sarh in Southern Chad visited Nigeria to make a formal request to Monsignor Godwin Akpan, then Acting Superior General of the Society. Later on, Fr. Aloysius Ezewanta, an MSP priest then working in Ngaondere, Cameroon was detailed to go to Sarh to survey the pastoral possibilities in the area. Of that visit, the bishop says: “When Fr. Aloysius arrived, we were touched by his simplicity. He came by public transport with a small bag that could barely contain a spare shirt. And then he had just his breviary. The Nigerian community wanted to organize a welcome party for him, but on Sunday morning, he got up, celebrated mass in the chapel, declined to be hosted and just left. So we were greatly touched by his simplicity and sense of detachment. I believe he brought back a very good report to the Central Administration of the MSP that made them to send us information after three months that the priests were coming.”

The first group eventually arrived in 1997. They were Frs. Chrysanthus Udoh, Raymond Abuga and Aloysius Ezewanta. There were a lot of difficulties at this initial stage. Regrettably, the mission was discontinued. Fr. Aloysius became ill and had to go for treatment. Fr. Raymond was transferred, and Fr. Chysanthus had to leave because he could not continue the work alone. In 2002 the mission re-opened with Frs. John Anih and Livinus Torty going to Sarh. Though they have been reassigned to other missions, there has been no break since then.

The Children of Chad
The Catholic Church in Chad

By John Anih, MSP

In this write-up Fr. John Anih who was in Chad for a few years gives an insight into the Catholic Church in Chad.

Chad is the last country to be evangelized by Christian missionaries in Africa. This is due to its geographical location. Being locked up in the middle of the continent, it was very difficult for missionaries to penetrate it earlier than the 1930’s. The first missionaries arrived in the 1930’s through The Central African Republic in the south and the northern Cameroon in the west. Catholicism first came to southern Chad in the present day Sarh in 1930 through the French Spiritans, however real evangelization started in 1939. The Spiritans later left and were replaced by the Capuchins, the Oblates, the Jesuits and the Combonians who did great work in the whole country. There are seven dioceses and a prefecture in the country. They are: N’djamena Archdiocese, Sarh, Mondou, Lai, Pala, Gore, and Doba dioceses, and the prefecture of Mongo. Of the eight, six are in the south while only N’djamena and Mongo prefecture are in the middle belt. There is none in the north as N’djamena covers the rest of the country. Of the seven bishops and an administrator, two are indigenous diocesans; incidentally both of them have their roots in Sarh diocese, and were ordained priests the same day in 1977. Among the others, two are Jesuits, two Combonians, one Oblate, and one Capuchin. Of this number, there are two French, two Italians, one Canadian, and one Spaniard. The make-up of the hierarchy shows the sort of variety in the Church in Tchad. This variety contributes so much to its richness and beauty. Most of the dioceses have a radio station that broadcasts daily. There are two major seminaries in the country, one in Sarh and the other in N’djamena, and about seven junior seminaries. The lay people are strongly involved in the Church here.

As at 1997 when the first MSP priests came to Sarh, the diocese had eight priests. Today, it has more than 20, active indigenous priests. There are about 70, other missionaries (priests, religious, and the lay) from 19, countries of all the continents working there.
While I was on sabbatical in Italy in May 2005, I was asked by the then Superior General Fr. Hyacinth Egbebo if I could take up the challenge of going to the mission in Chad. I replied that I would go to whichever mission I was sent. I was officially assigned to Chad in June 2005.

My first challenge was to prepare myself mentally, not just to face a new mission but a whole new way of life as an MSP priest. I had spent all my priestly life on academics and training of younger MSP priests. Now it was time to work with and under some of them. I knew that would make a demand on my mental disposition.

The mission in Chad was peculiar and largely perceived negatively by some as a difficult if not impossible mission. I felt an additional challenge to change this perception by adopting a new orientation and approach to this mission. Right from the beginning, I was deeply motivated to go to Chad. It offered me an opportunity to move on in my missionary life after a long and sometimes difficult time in the seminary as a Rector and member of the formation team.

My arrival in Chad was in March 2006. The initial difficulties were real: language, culture, etc., were all different. It was as if I was starting everything from scratch and all my past knowledge and experiences did not count. But with time things improved. I mastered French the official language and also learnt to communicate very well in the local Sara language.

Firstly, I wholeheartedly believe in the MSP mission in Chad. I think God wanted us to go and work in Chad. I am fulfilled as a missionary in Chad. I think God loves the Chadian and wants MSP missionaries to tell the Good News of His love and not be put off by their poverty.
As a missionary working here in Chad, I am moved to sympathy that even though we are still poor in Nigeria, we are so much better off. We have more material things and more priests available to serve the faithful. I often identify with the sentiments of many early missionaries who made personal sacrifices to come to the aid of the needy people and to bring the gospel to them. My earlier training as a *missiologist* and other varied experiences have been a big boost to my work in Chad. My earlier study of mission methods and other auxiliary sciences help me to approach the people with great respect. I love their language, their culture and the strangeness of their customs does not pose a big problem to me.

I think that Chad is the number One mission with its unique experiences and challenges among the other MSP missions a place where real missionaries should aspire to be. I am happy and grateful to be in Chad and would happily continue my missionary work in Chad if that is the wish of the Missionary Society of St. Paul.

*Fr Ogar was ordained in 1989. After obtaining a doctorate in Missiology from Rome he began to teach at the MSP seminary in Abuja, where he later became Rector for many years.*

**Fr. Magnus Ogbonna, MSP**

I arrived Chad in company of Fr. John Anih on November 21, 2005. I however got to the diocese of Sarh on November 24. In all, the journey which began in Nigeria on November 19 took a total of five days. It was the longest journey I had ever made. We had a lot to bring to Chad including the car we were travelling with. I left the MSP headquarters in Kutunku, Gwagwalada Abuja, with great enthusiasm. I must say I was never sure of what the mission had in store for me. The journey was good though we encountered some problems because of the car and the loads we were carrying. On arrival, I was welcomed by the people. I tried settling. Things weren’t easy. My first challenge was language and the second was food.

I was at the Holy Mary of Annunciation parish Goundi from December 2005 to June 2007. It is 60 km away from Koumra where I am now. The place was quite difficult for me. I saw myself being reduced to a concelebrating priest even on Sundays. One can imagine a priest who was used to celebrating two to three masses on a Sunday just settling to concelebrate one mass. At times I felt useless. I remember the Easter Sunday of that year. Though I was available, many priests were looking for whom to cover up for them in their parishes while they went to the bush stations. I must thank my then parish priest late Fr. Anselm Loubanhonde, God rest his soul, who gave me one of the masses in French to celebrate every week. That was very helpful for me. On the flip side all my weekdays were spent preparing my homily for that day. I also had a nun who helped me to improve on my French. I thank God she was very available. At times it was difficult getting basic food items like legumes. We just had to manage.

A year later, I moved to the next stage where I was now actively involved in pastoral activities. I was really baffled by the number of baptisms. Baptism here is like a status symbol. They are glad to affirm, “Je suis baptisé” meaning, I am baptised. In this situation, I discarded all preconceived ideas. The input I make is always based on my evaluation of what I see on ground.

I came to St Francis Xavier parish Koumra in September 2007 after a three months holiday in Nigeria. It was a different reality from Goundi. One had to make some distance before getting to the parish. It was very difficult for me. A year later, I was appointed the parish priest. This is my function till date. It has been quite challenging. It brought me closer to the people. My greatest challenge is marriage related problems. Many people begin from where they ought to have ended; that is pregnancy and childbearing. The bride prize is often not paid. People often find themselves in situations that make it difficult to consider them for baptism or other sacraments. Sometimes I try to mediate between two families in order to get the two parties reach a settlement. It has often worked because they not only get their situation regularized but also get some catechesis on marriage. We still hope to see that moment when Christian youths begin their marital life the proper way. A major problem we face is that of finance. There are a lot of ideas, projects in mind, but the means to get them done is often not there.

*Fr. Magnus was ordained in 2004. After his compulsory one year pastoral assignment in Nigeria he began mission work in Chad.*
AMSP from St Thomas Aquinas Okokomaiko, Lagos coming for their thanksgiving during Open Day 2010.

The Chairperson of Open Day 2010 Engr. Philip Chukwu flanked by Fr. Alabi (left) and Fr. Olaseni (right).

Ready to go...(From left) Frs. Henry Osuagwu, William Ukpeh, and Nduka Uzor, all MSP priests shortly before departing Abuja to begin missionary work in the Bahamas.

Bringing gifts during the thanksgiving.

The Superior General leads the group from St Kizito primary School.

Children of St Kizito primary School.
Fr. Aloy Nzekwe (right) with some AMSP in Houston, TX ready to “Walk 4 the Mission” on Jan. 30, 2010.

Fr. Umoren, Superior General watches as Archbishop Onaiyekan greets Fr. Igbafe during Open Day.

Wedding of Cecilia and Denis both AMSP at Holy Trinity Navy Barracks, Calabar, recently.

Jos. Thanksgiving on Open Day.

Koumra Chad run by the MSP
Fr. Mark Thomas Ameh, MSP

When I was assigned to work in Chad in 2007, I was a bit afraid because of all the scary stories we had heard about the mission while in the seminary. I was also worried because it would be the first time I would be travelling far away from Nigeria. And worse still, since I was going to a French speaking country I faced the challenge of learning new languages such as French and the local languages of the people. However, I summoned courage and prepared myself psychologically and mentally for the uphill task. Before I left Nigeria, I did a crash programme in French language at Le Village Français (The French Village) in Badagry, Lagos. Coming here, I have come to realise that without some knowledge of the language one can do very little pastoral work. As a matter of fact only about six persons speak English in the whole of our town, Koumra.

As I look back to the few years that I have spent here, I have cause to give thanks to God. Initially, it was challenging having to put into practice the little French I had gathered up and catch-up with the local language, but now I can communicate meaningfully in French, and celebrate Mass in French. I can also celebrate Mass in the local Sar language. I have found Sar very fascinating. This is one of the major languages spoken here in the southern part of the country. It has some semblance in tone with my own native Idoma language, spoken back home in Nigeria. The first day I heard a song in Sar language at Mass, I almost thought I was in my native Idoma land. Sar language, like many African languages is full of interesting musical tones.

Working in Chad has been very challenging and at the same time very interesting. The climate is very harsh and unfriendly. Illiteracy, poverty and underdevelopment are big issues here due to years of war and successive military dictatorship. Since white collar jobs are very hard to find, more than two-thirds of the entire Chadian population live on subsistent farming.

Most of the parishioners are peasant farmers, and petty traders. In spite of our poor economic status my people love to celebrate. Therefore our liturgical celebration is full of external signs; a lot of singing, dancing, and clapping. For the Sara people no matter what, life must be celebrated. Therefore there is no dull moment during the celebration of the Eucharist.

I will greatly treasure every moment I spend in Chad. For me the experiences are life transforming as they help me to be in touch with my humanness. I have now come to realise that mission is not all about what you have done or achieved but what you are to the people with whom you work. Mission by presence is a very strong way of witnessing here in Chad. I think Chad is an experience which every MSP priest needs to have.

Fr. Ameh ordained in 2006, was assistant parish priest at Christ the King Catholic Church, Ojo Lagos, before beginning his mission in Chad.

Fr. Gordian Iwuji, MSP

One morning, while still savouring my first pastoral assignment in Abuja Archdiocese, I was invited to our Society headquarters and subsequently handed a letter. Opening the envelope, I saw a new pastoral assignment to the Republic of Chad. I felt somewhat apprehensive because of some negative stories I had heard about the mission. The pain of leaving my family and friends, especially my aged parents suddenly dawned on me. However, I prayed silently asking God’s will to be done.

It’s been two years since I set my foot in Chad. Being a minister of the gospel here entails immense sacrifice. It is a life of total self-giving. But in all I feel God has been faithful.

The challenge of living in Chad has forced me to reflect on the call to discipleship. Peter had asked Jesus the all important question: Lord what about us who have left everything to follow you? (Mt 19:27). This question by St. Peter was so spontaneous. In other words, Peter is asking Jesus to state in clear terms what the rewards, material or otherwise would be for all those who have left everything to follow Him. Peter’s question is ‘human’ because as humans we do not turn our backs to things just like that. Peter knew that as a human, if you are leaving something or place you aspire to something better or higher. After my priestly ordination, I felt some kind of relief. I felt I had arrived at some improved state in my vocation. Like Peter, I never paid attention to this remark of Jesus, when you were young you went wherever you wanted, but when you grow old, a belt is put around your waist and you are dragged to where you would rather not go.

Jesus has used many people to support our missionary work in Chad. To such people, I want to say Thank you!

Fr. Gordian was ordained in 2006. He did his compulsory pastoral year at St. Paul’s Catholic Church, Gwagwalada Nigeria. Chad is his first mission posting.
The challenge of Chad

By Fr Patrick E. Akekpe, MSP

The MSP mission in Chad poses huge challenges. A trip to the mission itself is an ordeal. Chad is a vast arid country where movement of persons and goods can be difficult, risky and expensive. There are no direct air services between Nigeria and Chad. To go by air, one would have to go to Cotonou in nearby Republic of Benin and take a flight that plies the Central African route. This option is cumbersome and the cost is prohibitive. Many travellers from Nigeria going to Chad are forced to go by road. The journey by road is long and tortuous. The 350 km or so journey from the Nigerian border town of Banki through Cameroon and ending in Kouserri the Cameroonian border town with Chad, is a test of endurance, and for lovers of wild adventure, a trip of plenty surprises.

Travelling within Chad, meeting with MSP priests and other missionaries a few facts became clear to me on what the life of a missionary in that country entails. A first time missionary to Chad is understandably overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges he has to confront. The first of these is language. Though French is the official language, other local languages co-exist. The missionary must learn at least one local language if he/she hopes to have a fruitful ministry. The fresh missionary here must pocket his notions of decency. As he packs his bags to come to this mission, he must give away his fanciful clothes and shoes and other apparels. To be decked in expensive clothes and shoes in the midst of so many poorly dressed men, women and children is to appear clownish. The culture shock here is real. The missionary soon discovers how different the people are from those he left at home. If he has come from a culture where things work with clocklike efficiency, he must learn to suspend or alter his notion of time. He must pray and beg God for the virtue of patience. He must take one day at a time and should not be overtly preoccupied with the future or grandiose plans and accomplishments. If he does not learn this lesson, he is doomed ab initio.

The life of a missionary here is one of total self-giving. It is a mission of witness. The first temptation of a new missionary here is to think that he/she can completely alleviate the material poverty of the people. However, as time passes, he realises that plumbing the depths of this material poverty is like emptying the waters of the Atlantic into a bucket. The poverty here is both systemic and anthropological. When the missionary begins to expect immediate results from his efforts he has set foot on the path of frustration. As for fruits, he must bear in mind that those may take generations to come.

The missionary here must bear witness with his life. By leaving his comfort zone of a familiar culture, family ties and friendship to share in the life and destiny of these people, he demonstrates the goodness and generosity of God. By sharing in their way of life and renouncing legitimate pleasures, the missionary here says to the people, “I am one of you. Our destiny is inseparably bound by our common baptism. We are sons and daughters of God.” He assures them of his readiness to journey with them in their misery and poverty, “I make a conscious choice to remain with you. I do not pretend to have the answers to the issues that have plagued your existence for generations, but I believe in our shared humanity.”

If the missionary comes from a place where the Church is vibrant and buoyant, and priests are adulated and pampered, he must quickly adjust his mentality. Here, priests are often addressed by their first names, even by children. Titles mean nothing. He should not become angry if children call him ‘James’ instead of Fr. James. He should cheerfully accept that no one is intimidated or overawed by his clerical status or spiritual authority. If after Sunday Mass the collection is barely enough to buy the litres of petrol that took him to the church, he should not grumble or become disillusioned. The people themselves ride mostly in ox-drawn carts that have no need for any kind of fuel, except hay for the oxen to munch.

Lastly, as the missionary sets foot on the land for the first time he must repeat within himself the psalmist’s prayer, “With an honest heart I have offered up all things joyfully, O my God”. He must conclude his devotions with this prayer from the Midday Office, Monday Week 1: “God, Lord and master of the vineyard, you allot us our tasks and determine the just rewards of our labours. Help us to bear the burden of the day and accept your will in all things without complaint. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.”
MSP Projects in Chad and how you can help

Vehicles:
One of the greatest challenges for the average missionary in Chad is mobility. Many of the roads are unpaved. During the season of rains, most of them become impassable, except with four wheel drives. The present sets of MSP have two weather beaten vans in dire need of urgent replacements. The cost of maintaining these vehicles to keep them road worthy is high. Donations can be made to the promotions department for this cause.

School Project:
Illiteracy is the bane of many Chadians especially those in the rural areas where MSP priests minister. In one of the primary schools run by an MSP parish the children learn under thatch roofed huts. The schools are closed during the rains, making it impossible for the children to have an uninterrupted academic programme throughout the year. Money is needed to build child-friendly classrooms roofed with corrugated iron sheets. Uniforms and furniture and books have to be provided for these children. Many parents can hardly afford to give their children a decent meal a day. Paying school fees is out of the question.

Primary Healthcare:
The rate of maternal mortality is very high. Pregnant women who live in rural areas often die as they are ferried by ox-drawn carts to the nearest health facility when labour sets in. In many cases, these clinics are more than 50 kilometers from their homes. Infant mortality is also high due to lack of adequate nutrition. MSP missionaries try to help. But their help is like a drop in the ocean of needs of these people. Funds provided by generous donors will help in the construction of health clinics in the rural areas.

Upkeep of Priests:
The Church in Chad like many missionary churches is poor. Most foreign missionaries survive with the support they get from their home countries. The local church struggles to meet the needs of the local clergy, catechists and other church workers. Nigerian missionaries require a lot of support from their home church. Such support can come in the form of buying airfare tickets for missionaries, providing funds that will help supplement the budget they need to provide decent housing and good food for themselves.

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Mr. Beara is a community church leader and an ex-soldier. A devoted member of the parish church he was in the team that translated the Bible from French to Sara the indigenous language. Mr Beara is a cradle Catholic and has known the MSP since 2003 when he first came in contact with Fr. John Anih, MSP. He has fond memories of Fr. John. He remembers him especially for the many development projects he initiated while there. Among these is the St Francis Catholic Church. In assessing the work of the MSP in Chad, Mr. Beara contends that the priests of the Society who have worked in Sarh are pastorally zealous. In his words, “the MSP give themselves to the mission”. He believes that this good work can be sustained if more MSP are sent to work in Chad. As for him just four MSP priests in the diocese of Sarh is not enough.

Fr. Prosper Allahissem is the parish priest of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Church in Koumra. He was ordained in January 2005 for the diocese of Sarh. He first came in contact with the MSP as a deacon in 2004. He recalls that his interaction with Fr. John Anih was transformational. The first experience he had was that of fraternity. There were no distinctions of any sort, whether based on where someone was from or what language he spoke. He remembers Fr. Anih for his openness and generosity especially in helping to procure a means of transportation.

For him, the special contribution of the MSP lies in the fact the Church in Chad needs the sharing of the experience of the Nigerian Church. In his words “Christians here need to know the experience of other Christians. For a Chadian to speak of supporting the Church doesn’t make much sense, but when the appeal is made by outsiders it does make much sense. The fact that we are all blacks help our own people to understand, that if these missionaries can do, so too they.” Fr. Prosper is confident that future MSP priests to Chad should rest assured that their brother priests who are Chadians are ready to work with them. He says the field of evangelization is vast and there is a job for everyone. The motto of the diocese is “Come and see”. The diocese is ready to welcome all new comers with open-arms.

Fact: Two million Chadians, or 18 percent of the population, are in a situation of food insecurity great deal needs to be done to counter this grave problem.

- Michele Flavigna, UN representative in Chad, 2010.
Nov 17
I arrive Maiduguri from Lagos via Arik Air. The flight which makes a brief stopover in Abuja is smooth and uneventful. I head straight from the airport to St Patrick’s Cathedral where a room had been prepared for me.

Nov 18
After an early Mass I head straight to Banki Park. There I board a taxi that would take me to Banki, the border town between Nigeria and Cameroon. The ride to Banki is rough. I cross over on foot to the Cameroonian side. The immigration officer at the post stamps my passport without questions. The medium of communication changes to French. I change my naira into CFA. I search for a taxi to take me to Kousseri the border town between Cameroon and Chad. Seven of us are cramped into a 504 salon car. I am squeezed between a nursing mother and a young man. My knees hurt badly. I complain loudly in English. Everyone ignores me. The journey is rough and tough, but we make it to Kousseri before night fall. My confrere Fr. Gordian is waiting for me. He takes me through the Chadean immigration. The men looked hostile and officious. They openly demand for gratification. We make it to N’Djamena the capital city and check into the pastoral centre for the night.

Nov 19
We are up early to begin the nearly 750 kilometres journey that would take me to the MSP mission in Koumra, southern Chad. We head to the bus station to take one of the early buses of the Abou Salam transport company. The Coaster bus with registration number 08 B 0118 A TCH seats 32 passengers. Our driver is a turbaned young man with a fierce look and bloodshot eyes. He drives with one hand and smokes with the other. Sometimes, the ‘smoking hand’ is free and he makes a call on his mobile phone. He drives recklessly. The road is cluttered. He dodges goats, cows, potholes and chickens. He applies the brakes suddenly on many occasions and many passengers hold their breaths. The long drive continues. The driver keeps smoking and dodging cows and goats. At about 5 pm we finally reach Koumra and everyone heaves a sigh of sweet relief. Fr. Magnus Ogbonna comes to pick us from the bus station. We head to the parish house. Fr. Augustine Ogar phones in to welcome me to Chad. Fr. Mark Ameh joins shortly before supper.

Nov 20
I wake up at 5 am to get ready for Mass in the parish church at 6 am. The liturgy is in the local dialect and I am completely lost. I concelebrate using my imagination to follow parts of the mass. After breakfast I have a meeting with the MSP priests working here. They keep me abreast of pastoral activities. We have a photo session thereafter. Later Frs. Magnus and Mark take me to see some places where the MSP carry out their pastoral activities. I visit a primary school where I see children receiving instructions in thatched huts. In the evenings we make a tour of the outstations and I am confronted with the poverty of the rural folks here. In spite of their material lack, the faith means a lot to them here. I see ox-drawn carts everywhere. I am told that it is the main means of transportation. Night sets in very quickly and the town of Koumra is enveloped in pitch darkness. The chirps of crickets fill the chilly night air and a cold wind caresses the body.

Nov 21
Today is the memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I join at mass again and the only inkling I have of the celebration is the white vestments we wear. I catch many hours of sleep during the day. The fatigue of the endless hours of travels finally catches up with me. In the evening I say Vespers round the graveside of three missionaries near my apartment in the parish premises. There are no names on the tombstones. Like the Unknown Soldier, the value of their sacrifices is not diminished by their anonymity. I ponder awhile on the dreams, hopes and aspirations buried beneath the concrete slabs-far away from family, homes and friends. I am reminded of the words of Jesus, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground, it remains but a single grain, but if it falls and dies it yields much fruit.” I realise that this is the potential lot of every true missionary-to pour out his or her life as a libation for the people he is called to serve, and if God wills to pay the ultimate sacrifice.
Nov 22
I am up early, I have to attend Sunday Mass at the MSP parish under the pastorate of Fr. Magnus Ogbonna and Mark Ameh. The first Mass is in Sara, the local language. The celebration is full of vivacity. I am told that the people follow the Zairean rite in their liturgy. There is lot of singing and dancing. The entire liturgy bears the atmosphere of a festival. People are seated through the major parts of the Mass such as the penitential rite, gospel and even consecration. In the cultural milieu of the people, seating is the posture of sacrifice. When elders adjudicate everyone is seated. The second Mass is in French. The atmosphere is more formal. The choir is modern. There are jazz drums and keyboards. But there is an absence of spontaneity. After mass the children are all excited by the photo session. They smile, grin and fight for vantage positions before the camera. Later in the evening I ride with Fr. Magnus to the second MSP parish at Bedaya. The road is rough and dusty. Frs. Augustine Ogar and Gordian Iwuji run the parish.

Nov 23
We have an early mass at 5.30am. Frs Ogar, Iwuji and I cram into the only front seat of the pick-up van. Fr. Ogar drives. We are on our way to Sarh the seat of the diocese. The journey to Sarh is about 2 hours. The road is unpaved, dusty and has failed in many places. It is a tough ride, and to while away time, we turn ourselves into a mini people’s parliament discussing Nigeria’s and Africa’s numerous problems. Eventually we reach Sarh a bustling medium sized city. It should rank as the dustiest city in the world. Hardly any road is tarred. School children, domestic animals and ox-drawn carts jostle for space in the town’s wide dusty boulevards. There are trees everywhere, thanks to the foresight of early French settlers. I visit the Cathedral and the major seminary. After lunch we take the long dusty road back to Koumra. Everyone is tired. We drive back in silence soaking in the dust without complaint.

Nov 24
My stay is coming to an end. I rise early to catch the bus back to N’Djamena, from where I can begin my journey to Maiduguri. It is often said that thunder does not strike the same place twice. But Fr Gordian who again is accompanying me back on the return journey points out that the bus available is the exact bus that brought us from N’Djamena a few days earlier. The greater tragedy is that it is also the same driver. He drives recklessly, smokes with one hand and makes calls with the other. No one challenges him. The long tortuous journey which began at 8:00 am eventually comes to an end at about 6:00 pm. After disembarking we ask the other Chadian passengers what their opinions are of the driver. They all agree that he is not fit to be on the wheels. Some even suggest that he should be ‘prosecuted for crimes against humanity’. We ask them why they didn’t challenge him. One of them sighs deeply, saying in resignation that the driver and his group are the rulers of the country. Well, as we found out later, the transport company is reputedly owned by the president’s wife!

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE MSP MISSION IN CHAD

The Catholic Ambassador Vol 27 No 2 19

Stations of the Resurrection
By Efiri Matthias Selemobri, M.S.P.

Do you want your next Mass, Sunday or Easter to be more prayerful?
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On Fostering Hospitality

By Barbara Budde

This is a special note to parish staffs and committees. All etiquette is based on hospitality. Since parish liturgy is about extending the Lord’s hospitality to others, etiquette must reflect the inclusiveness of the kingdom Jesus described in the gospels. It is important that parish communities as a whole act in the following ways:

- Welcome the stranger and guest and instruct the ushers in hospitable behaviours.
- Welcome the children and young people of the parish, as well as adults. Children and teens are not only the Church of the future, they are the Church NOW!
- Introduce the presider, the lector, and others taking a leading role in the Mass before Mass begins.
- Often the cantor or leader of song can introduce the presider: “The presider for today’s Mass is … The opening hymn is… Please stand and let us begin.”
- Give instructions periodically to all parishioners about how to receive Communion (going and coming with reverence; giving clear signals to the Eucharistic ministers about how to receive- in the hand or on the tongue) and encourage people to receive the Blessed Sacrament under both species - Body and Blood- when it is offered.
- Develop a ministry of hospitality that involves the whole parish taking an active role. Any adult or teen, for example, can compliment children whose behaviour is good.
- Remind the assembly before the liturgy to silence electronic devices, mobile phones, alarm watches, etc.
- Invite liturgical ministers to model appropriate dress to the assembly and guests.
- Develop and communicate to ushers and to all parishioners any parish policies concerning late arrivals (which doors to use, for example), early departures, families with noisy children (go to a designated area of vestibule, for example) – thoughtful ways of acting that will cause the least disruption to the assembly at prayer.
- Encourage parishioners to be a little more tolerant of children, while also cautioning parents to take a really noisy, upset child for a walk.

Altar boys and girls lead the procession at Sunday Mass at St Francis Xavier in Koumra, Chad.
The book has two sections. Section one has the title: “Prayer at the Foot of the Cross”. Section two is captioned: “Other Prayers”. In this book, especially in section one, the author, Fr Eke, demonstrated his prowess and knowledge on prayer. It is an original work, the fruit of personal prayer life and experience, praying at the foot of the Cross. The author beautifully combined his spirituality, teaching skill, personality and lived prayer life in a manner that is both eloquent and attractive.

His litany style is not original, but the contents of the litanies are personal and original. His dexterity in articulating the various life situations is most commendable, and renders the prayer formularies natural and real.

The personal flare of the prayers is rather magnetic. And in this regard, the author is perfectly in line with orthodoxy and the correct notion of prayer. While the personal touch of the prayers is obvious, the communal qualities of the prayers are the objective and aim of the book. Fr Eke intimated me that Jesus’ encounter with the robber crucified by his side was a major inspiration for his creating the prayer at the foot of the Cross. “If Jesus instantly granted the prayer of the robber crucified by his side” Fr Eke said, “then our prayer at the foot of the Cross will equally be granted.”

Section two of the book, which contains “Other Prayers”, leaves its own traces of originality. The author exhibited his ability to adapt and apply universal prayers to specific situation in the life of the person. This approach is in consonance with the Church’s teaching on prayer. He did this by modification of the original texts and slight additions which signify his personal input and mark of authority in an area that is his field of specialization.

The simplicity of the book, when juxtaposed with its rich content, spontaneously uplifts the human soul in songs of praise to God. The author, Very Reverend Fr Martin Eke, MSP, embellished his work with many spiritual citations, thus offering his readers biblical passages that will enable them to reflect and to meditate. It is a great work, indeed! This book is a treasure and a good help to all who experience difficulties praying alone by themselves.

To purchase your copy email martinekemsp@yahoo.com.
Are People Hearing the Truth?

By Dr. (Sr.) Léonie McSweeney, MB, MMM, MFR

About four years ago, in an earlier edition of Ambassador, I referred briefly to the serious connection between procured abortion and cancer of the breast. Due to the growing concern about this connection, up to the end of 2006 there had been 33 extensive studies worldwide. I believe there is need for all of us to do whatever we can, to inform young and old about the danger. For this reason I think readers will appreciate why I have put below a large quotation from the booklet produced some months ago, False Beliefs about Sex & Conception.

In September 2009, after the above book was written, there came to my notice yet another disturbing confirmation of this tragic situation. I quote from the World Journal of Surgical Oncology (2009 7:37): “A statistically significant new study at the Istanbul Medical Facility and Magee-Women's Hospital, reports a 66% increase in the breast cancer risk among women who had any abortions (procured)” Ozmen et al: Breast cancer risk in Turkish Women.

Two points of great importance need to be clarified whenever discussing the question of breast cancer and abortion.

1. Breast cancer is common in women who have never been pregnant in their lives and never had an abortion.

2. It is important to understand that miscarriage or spontaneous (accidental) abortion has no connection with breast cancer. It is only the sudden, forceful procuring of an abortion that can sometimes, (but certainly not always) lead to cancer of the breast.

Having made those two points clear, there is no doubt about the fact “that there is increasing evidence to show that procured abortion greatly increases the chances of women getting cancer of the breast. A woman's first pregnancy causes hormonal changes which change the structure of the breast. When a pregnancy is ended forcibly, this process is interrupted. Instead of the breast returning to normal, as it would after a birth or miscarriage, a procured abortion leaves the cells of the breast suspended in a transitional half-way state. Cells in this state face a high risk of developing cancer. In the case of a miscarriage, there is a gradual change which does not have this risk.”

“Regarding this concern, up to the end of 2006 there have been 33 epidemiological studies worldwide, including those conducted in Japan, U.S., Denmark and U.K. Of these studies, 27 confirmed the suspected danger of significantly higher risk of breast cancer in those who underwent procured abortion.”

This is a quotation from False Beliefs about Sex & Conception, (page 10) and does not include the Turkish research mentioned above, as the book was written some months before that publication.

Let us pray that those in a position to influence government decisions worldwide about the matter of legalising abortion, may realise what is at stake for women, for mothers and in the long run for their children.

The book, Love & Life: Billings Method of Natural Family Planning, together with a set of five VCDs containing ten classes presented by Dr. Léonie McSweeney, is available from P.L.A.N., address below, and many bookshops. Also obtainable is our 2009 publication, False Beliefs about Sex & Conception at low cost and 20% discount, with an attractive poster displaying its contents.

Pro-Family Life Association of Nigeria (P.L.A.N.), P.L.A.N. National Hqrs., Opp. St.Mary's Hospital, Eleta, IBADAN. Tel. (office hours) 08066063259, 08037167664. E-mail: leomcswe@skannet.com and leomcswe@gmail.com
Daily Prayer for MSP

Heavenly Father, you created us and you care for us.

We thank you for taking the Missionary Society of St. Paul into your care. We ask you to continue to watch over us. Fill us with your love, and help us to build a family where each member irrespective of tribe, feels at home with other members and is encouraged to give his best in the missionary work.

Lord Jesus, you died for us and you call us to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth; we thank you for enabling us to participate in this your saving work among people of every race. Fill us with zeal and a sense of commitment like St. Paul, to bear witness to your love and reconciliation. Help us with a lifestyle that will make us proclaim your Word with power and conviction. Send us your grace to make good whatever is lacking in us as individuals and as a Society.

O Holy Spirit, you enlightened the hearts of the apostles, we beseech you now to continue to enlighten us and consecrate us in the truth. May each of us realize how invaluable our contributions can be, and thus invest our energies towards the success of our missionary endeavours. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady Queen of Apostles, pray for us St. Paul our Patron, pray for us. May the souls of our departed MSP brothers, AMSP brothers and sisters, and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

(To be said daily by all MSP and AMSP)

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"The MSP have come not so much with their money, but with their persons, their faith, their spirituality and the heritage of their vibrant religious family!"

Bishop Edmund Djitaangar, Sarh Diocese, Chad.

Fr. Gordian Iwuji mounts his motorbike as he undertakes a tour of bush stations in Bedaya, Southern Chad.

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