

The Igbo Catholic Community USA

XI Annual Convention, Raleigh North Carolina

April 27 – 29, 2013

Dear brothers and sisters,

About a year ago, we celebrated the Igbo Catholic Community USA's tenth annual convention in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was a well-organized and inspiring gathering of brethren. All of us in attendance enjoyed ourselves and, therefore, owe debts of gratitude to a number of individuals: Fr. Joseph Oji and his able lieutenants, the convention committee, the entire Raleigh Chapter including the many cheerful volunteers. We are indebted to the priests as well as the choir. Your participation during mass was phenomenal. May I also acknowledge Fr. James Okafor for his powerful and uplifting homily. To every speaker, presenter, consultant, workshop facilitator, and exhibitor, thank you for sharing your knowledge and faith. Above all, I will like to express my appreciation of members who chose to spend their vacation time and hard-earned savings to be physically present in Raleigh. We take great hope and are encouraged by the 175+ youth and young adults who were there. It is with confidence that we declare that not only are they the next generation of Igbo Catholics, they are the now generation.

From the first through its successive conventions, the Igbo Catholic Community, USA has developed, documented, and reiterated its values, beliefs, priorities and commitments. These have guided our leaders, chapters and communities during the one-year intervals between Conventions. During our tenure, we relied on those "Convention plan for action" for guidance and direction. It augurs well for continuity and consistency. In the same vein, the 2013 Convention Plan stipulates and elaborates on areas for action related to the Convention theme: "Community empowered through Faith!" A common thread between the workshops, retreats and plenary sessions was the challenge to "Empower. Equip. Evangelize." At the concluding general assembly of our tenth Convention, a packed ballroom of spirited Catholics came to their feet and with great enthusiasm, affirmed a plan for engaging the faithful and doing the multi-faceted work of evangelization.

Blessed John Paul II and our Holy Father Benedict XVI have called for a new evangelization to confront a secularizing world. The dearth of priests and seminarians, essential to our Eucharistic faith, perhaps, speak to lapses in evangelization. Too many of our beloved Communities cannot effectively organize themselves neither can they support an Igbo Priest. In spite of the large population of Igbo Catholics in the USA, congregations are small and stewardship is weak. Convention leaders see the people in the pews aging and hear the lament of parents whose grown children no longer attend Mass. So we asked: What is needed to reinvigorate Community life and to sustain the Church for the future?

Good answers begin with reliable data, but very little research exists about the Igbo American Catholic family or community. While they may not proffer a panacea for our predicament, good research findings can educate our efforts and future direction. Recommendations gleaned from such studies, will become food for our collective thought and a map to guide our efforts. I know that we have capable

hands and good minds. Moreover, any documentation of our unique cultural and faith perspective is invaluable and a step in the right direction. Hopefully, such treatise motivates and inspires us as Igbo Catholics. I hope you will not leave it on your shelves or at the bottom of your electronic “inbox.” It behooves us to study it, pray about it and have discussions about it. Brethren, please commit to some action!

In conclusion, it is important that we take a look, annually, at outcomes vis-à-vis our plans of action. Such review will provide a picture of what works and what doesn't.

May God continue to bless our community, that by fully engaging our faith, we will grow in our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Mazi Sylvester Onwurah Okonkwo Ph.D

SUMMARY

“Community Empowered Through Faith: Engage, Empower, Equip, Evangelize” was the theme of the eleventh national convention of Igbo Catholics. More than four hundred Catholics from all over the United States and beyond attended the convention in Raleigh, North Carolina in April of 2013. One outcome of that gathering was this document, created to inspire and guide our actions in the future.

The document began with an original research to better understand the community life and needs of Igbo Catholics in the United States. In 2012, the National delegates, created a committee headed by Dr. Sylvester Okonkwo, to design and execute an unprecedented survey. The executives reviewed the survey results during several executive meeting deliberations. Their discussions and feedback suggested areas for action in order to better empower, equip, and evangelize Igbo Catholics in America. The ideas were summarized and discussed in different listening sessions, prior to the convention. They were then affirmed enthusiastically by the final general delegate meeting of Convention XI on April 27, 2013.

With this plan, Igbo Catholics called upon each other, and the broader Church, to live and express their faith in, at least, ten ways:

1. FAITH AWARENESS
2. LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON
3. ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY LIFE AND EVANGELIZATION
4. FAITH INFORMED
5. IGBO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE (TOO VALUABLE TO LOOSE)
6. REACHING OUT TO THE NEXT GENERATION: IGBO YOUNG ADULT, IF NOT NOW, WHEN?
7. IGBO CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULT SAVING THE WORLD: PRINCETON IN AFRICA
8. VOCATIONS – IT IS OUR PRIORITY AS CATHOLICS
9. MARRYING , STAYING MARRIED AND STOPPING DIVORCE
10. MY BROTHER’S KEEPER

For each of these calls to engagement, the Plan provides one or more Scriptural texts, an examination of how the Catholic tradition and the teaching of the Magisterium call us to action, an analysis of the data and experiences that shape Igbo Americans’ perspectives on the theme, and a list of ways to engage the call with concrete action.

An appendix provides some of the presentations, discussions and responses from an assembly of some youth and young adults at the Convention. Led by God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the youth and young adults committed to building the Igbo Catholic Community for the future, suggested youth-focused activities to engage young people in Community life, and asked for opportunities to grow in knowledge of the Scripture.

PROLOGUE

The joys, hopes, grief and anxieties of this age are reminiscent of those of earlier followers of Jesus Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human failed to echo in their hearts. For theirs was a community united in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of the Father. They welcomed the news of salvation, thus, the realization that their community was truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds. With these opening words of *Gaudium et Spes* more than a half century ago, the Second Vatican Council declared that we, the Church, are wholly engaged in our faith when we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are wholly engaged in the modern world.

This commitment to engage our faith fully and to engage with the world because of our faith motivated the eleventh convention of the Igbo Catholic Community USA. More than four hundred strong, we gathered in Raleigh from April 27-29, 2013, to celebrate the Catholic faith in the Igbo American community and to equip and empower ourselves for the work of evangelization. We understand evangelization to be the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ not only through our words and prayers, but through our actions. We came to Convention XI equipped with valuable information about our community. It may be a fair statement to say that contemporary studies of religious attitudes are rarely designed to capture the attitudes of religious and ethnic minorities.

Chapter reports affirmed the strengths of our community, provided some surprises and presented challenges as well. We affirmed that the Christian faith is very important to Igbo Americans, overall. The desire for Community life, the necessity to maintain our cultural identity and the satisfaction of attending Mass were strong among Igbo Catholics. We were encouraged by the findings indicating that young Igbo Catholics are committed to their faith and to Community life. These and similar findings affirm the strengths and positive examples that Igbo Catholics give to the universal Church.

Chapter reports highlighted racial and cultural challenges as they remain a part of the Igbo Catholic Community experience. Yet, by a large majority, most Igbo Catholics do not consider the Catholic Church “racist” and do not perceive racism or exclusion in their Communities.

In preparation for Convention XI, delegates around the country participated in sixteen (16) conference call meetings in 2012/2013 and reflected on different issues. At these meetings, participants reviewed resolutions and accomplishments of previous conferences. They also discussed how those findings could inform our future plan of action with a view to expanding and deepening the faith engagement of Igbo Catholics. Delegates reported back to their respective chapters and suggested priorities for implementing a plan of action in line with the Convention XI theme of “Igbo, Catholic and USA.” These commentaries provided the raw material for composing a draft plan of action.

During Convention XI, Dr. Marcelina Offoha –the President, Dr. Sylvester Okonkwo – the vice president, Sir Anthony Ifeanyi Ikebudu, Dr. Paul Amuchie, Professor Peter Ejiofor, Miss Chinua Ezeonu – young adult president, Miss Agatha Offorjebe, Dr. Jude Iheoma and Sr. Joanna Okereke HHCJ, facilitated discussion sessions to elicit comments for improvement. Attendance was impressive. Sr. Okereke conducted a quick survey and Professor Ejiofor provided contacts for comments. The draft plan was enthusiastically affirmed by the final General Assembly of Convention XI on April 28, 2013. At the conclusion of the convention, Dr. Okonkwo gathered documents, drafts and suggestions to create this final document.

CONVENTION PLAN OF ACTION 2013

We are committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the divine revelation, the gift of salvation, and the social and moral teachings of the Catholic Church. We are also committed to the growth in faith and charity of Igbo Americans. We recognize the need to bring purpose, order, and vitality to our work of evangelization in and to the Igbo American community.

This Convention Plan of Action is an organizational tool, offering guidelines and resources for the faithful, so that we may engage and spread the Good News. It is also a focal point for reflection on issues affecting us as families, cognizant of the cultural dynamism in our newly found home. We recognize that each chapter will adapt the plan to the particular needs of their local church.

I. FAITH AWARENESS

Social scientists have repeatedly found that Igbo Americans are highly educated and more religiously engaged than other Americans. Most of these reports confirm that Igbo Catholics have a “strong and resilient” faith. Weekly Mass attendance, reliance on the counsel of a priest, and engagement in Community life are common practices among Igbo Catholics. Overwhelmingly, and in every age group, Igbo Catholics declare religion an essential part of daily life. At the National Igbo Catholic Convention, we celebrate the faithfulness in our community and seek to sustain and nourish holiness in ourselves and future generations.

Empowered by the grace of God, we commit ourselves to conversion and holiness. Created in the image and likeness of God and called to live in perfect communion with Him, we commit ourselves to a life-long journey of faith, hope, and love. We commit ourselves to seeking to serve God by prayer, repentance, praise, and worship. We also commit to active service of our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need.

We renew our commitment to the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and the sacrament of Penance.

II. LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

“I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessing and God's curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life.” - Deuteronomy 30:19

“I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.” - John 10:10

As Catholics, we believe that “God’s creative action is present in every human life and is thus the source of its sacred value.” We are called to protect the sacredness and dignity of all human life from conception to natural death. We believe that human dignity does not depend on accomplishments or talents, nor is it rooted in race, age, gender, wealth, social status, or legal status. Each and every human person has dignity that deserves our respect, for that dignity comes from God. Our history as Igbo Americans makes us keenly aware that what is legal may not be just. Our experience as Igbo Americans shows us that we must be vigilant and insistent, so that legal institutions do not impede upon the freedom and dignity of any human person.

III. ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY LIFE AND EVANGELIZATION

“All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.” - Acts 2:44-47

“Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” - Matthew 28:19

All Christians are called to spread the Good News through word and deed. Catholic Church documents powerfully challenge us to “go and make disciples” and to “evangelize and make the world new.” Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI has called us to observe a Year of Faith from October 11, 2012 (the anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council) through November 24, 2013. We “go forth” from our home base, the Community. There, we learn and nourish our faith to build a community of believers. We contribute our time, talents and treasures so that the community thrives. From there, we go forth, as a Community and as individuals, to evangelize the world. Knowing that ordinary life is filled with evangelization moments, if our faith is engaged, we vow to live and speak faithfully--on the street, in the workplace, in the marketplace, and in our social activities, wherever we may be.

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

From its founding through the present, the Igbo Catholic Community Convention has promoted evangelization “through establishing an agenda for the evangelization of Igbo Americans.” At Convention XI, we celebrated the anniversary of What We Have Seen and Heard.

Igbo Christianity is eminently a social reality. The sense of community is a major component of Igbo spirituality . . . [that] permeates our experience of liturgy and worship. Worship must be shared. Worship is always a celebration of community. No one stands in prayer alone. One prays and acts within and for the community. Because evangelization begins in families, we are distressed at the occurrences in some of our families. We understand the overwhelming responsibilities of parenting in America. We are, therefore, encouraging Igbos to come together wherever they may be, numbers notwithstanding, and form a local chapter in order to encourage each other. We believe that the evangelization impact of the traditional Igbo American family cannot be overstated. Furthermore, local chapters are vital to the communities where they are situated. As the Second Vatican Council puts it: “the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives, render service to each other” (Gaudium et Spes 11). Service is not rendered when the people of God have shattered the basic pillars of a family and the church, scattering to the four winds. Therefore,

- We commit ourselves to invite those who have left the Church to prayerfully consider coming “home.” We encourage adaptation of successful Catholic evangelization programs to the specific needs of Igbo Americans. We especially encourage chapters to develop comprehensive programs for people seeking to join the Catholic Church, and we commit ourselves to supporting those efforts by extending personal invitations to others to attend our church events.
- Faith is engaged through community life, so we urge every community to promote registration of all Mass-goers and we urge all practicing Catholics to register in a Community.
- Full participation in a Community requires much more than registration. We urge each Community to prayerfully commit to full stewardship, including a generous financial commitment to sustaining the Community that sustains our faith.
- When chapter leaders face budget and personnel constraints, we know from experience that prior dialogue and input from the affected Community members are most helpful. Trust and good will are maintained when communication is open and forthcoming.
- We applaud the innovative approaches that some chapters have taken to support Communities ministering to the Igbo American community.
- Finally, when closure of a traditionally Igbo American church is unavoidable, we strongly urge the local chapter to work with a spirit of true communion, enabling the faithful who were accustomed to a traditionally Igbo American Community to find a new Community home that they can make their own.

IV. FAITH INFORMED

“Call together all the men, women, and children, and the foreigners who live in your towns, so that everyone may hear it and learn to honor the LORD your God and to obey his teachings faithfully.”
(Deuteronomy 31: 12)

We cannot engage our faith without understanding it. The catechism, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, recently wrote, “is fascinating because it speaks to us of our very destiny and that is why it concerns each one of us very closely.” It is challenging and life-changing, so the Pope continued:

“Because of this I ask you: study the catechism with passion and perseverance! Sacrifice your time for it! Study it in the silence of your room, read it together. If you have friends, form groups and study networks, exchange ideas on the Internet. In any case, remain in dialogue on your faith!”

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

The need to educate ourselves in the faith was a frequent theme in chapter reports on their days of reflection in preparation for Convention XI. This is important to us as individuals trying to understand “our very destiny,” but also because as a religious minority, we sometimes find ourselves challenged by friends and relatives who have misconceptions about the Catholic tradition. “Cradle Catholic” is a strong identity for many of us, yet our children find their identity challenged by friends from other Christian traditions. It is important to tell the story of our Catholic heritage and declare the presence of Catholics of Igbo descent in America.

Our faith engaged:

- We commit ourselves to deepening our knowledge and understanding, through Bible study, adult faith formation classes, catechesis, retreats, faith sharing and other means to spiritual growth.
- We urge chapters across the nation to honor Blessed Tansi Day as an Igbo Catholic awakening day every January 20th, sharing the long faith journey of our people around the world and in America.

V. IGBO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE - TOO VALUABLE TO LOSE!

“Truth, wisdom, learning, and good sense—these are worth paying for, but too valuable for you to sell (or lose).” - (Proverbs 23:23)

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

Families and Communities continue to be critical avenues for teaching and sustaining our language and culture. Whether community, regional, independent, or some other new variation, the critical characteristic is a family environment, where the values of language, culture, hope, charity, prayer, service, sacrifice, and respect for the dignity of every human person are taught and reinforced.

Our faith engaged:

- We call upon our community leaders and the many leading professionals among us: athletes, artists, and other public figures of Igbo extraction, to give back to the communities that gave them a strong academic and moral foundation.
- We show our support for Igbo language and cultural education in and for the Igbo community by some chapters, while urging other to emulate them.

See comprehensive presentation: “OCHE NDI IGBO BUNYELE ASUSU IGBO” as presented by Prof. Pita Ejiifo

VI. REACHING OUT TO THE NEXT GENERATIONS

“Young people, enjoy your youth. Be happy while you are still young. Do what you want to do, and follow your heart's desire. But remember that God is going to judge you for whatever you do.”

- Ecclesiastes 11: 9

We commit ourselves to the spiritual needs of our youth and young adults. Their participation in the life of the Church is vitally important to us. We especially commit ourselves to addressing the critical issues that challenge our youth in the areas of educational opportunities, social and professional development, as well as conflict resolution. The Church is adopting new ways to minister to the youth and to young adults, especially through social media and modern technology. Evangelization has always required adopting new languages and tools. So today, we must communicate with groups, particularly those under 40, by embracing and using their preferred technologies.

As Igbo Catholics, we have a sacramental understanding of reality—of real, not virtual, presence. For human persons to be Christ to one another, they must engage the whole human person. Social networks are not personal relationships. Text messages do not substitute for person-to- person conversation. New technologies offer new possibilities for evangelization but they cannot replace the fully-engaged, unabbreviated presence required to share the Eucharist, go to confession, or engage in corporal works of mercy. We uphold that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:1) – that is, incarnated, not virtual.

Reaching Out to the Next Generation: Igbo Catholic Young Adults

If not now, when? By Sr. Joanna Chinyere Okereke HHCI, Ph.D – see document

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

The Convention Plan of Convention XI (eleven) calls for greater attention to the spiritual needs of our Youth and Young Adults. Accordingly, the delegates responded with presentations and social events just

for the youth and young adults. The youth reflected on this plan and offered their collective response, reminding us that they are not the next generation, but the now generation, ready to be more fully engaged in the life of their Church. Catechists and youth ministers need resources that communicate the Gospel and challenge the youth to reflect upon its meaning for their own lives and life choices. An electronic “forum” at ICCUSA’s website will enable the youth and young adults across the country to post comments and start discussions. A Bible with commentaries, prayers, explanatory material, and original artwork, designed to speak to the cultural and faith traditions of African/Igbo American Catholic youth will, definitely, help.

Beyond outreach to those who are already involved in the Church, we are deeply concerned about those young people who seem to lack hope, faith, or charity. Too many of our young seek meaning, fulfillment and community, on the streets. Gun violence by and against our Igbo American youth is an affront to the dignity of the human person.

Our faith engaged:

- We applaud and support the beautiful statement of faith and plan of action for youth, which was created by the youth participants at Convention XI.
- We commit ourselves to a "holy use" of modern technology as a means of evangelization. We encourage younger communities to contribute their creativity and knowledge of the “new media” to developing effective means to share the Good News with the millennial generation. Furthermore, we urge pastors and their staff to welcome the young in leadership roles within their communities. They can help the community by incorporating new media and technologies in programs.
- We know that Jesus said “blessed are the peacemakers.” As young Catholics, we commit that we will not engage our minds, our money, or our time with music, media, or activities that glorify violence. We will strive to be peacemakers in our daily life and to be witnesses to the Gospel as it brings hope and life to those who embrace it.
- We continue to call upon community, chapter, and national leaders in the Church to promote leadership development among the youth and young adults, and to monitor their progress in expanding leadership participation by younger Catholics.
- We commit to establishing a dialogue with the USCCB, regarding the importance of Catholic schools serving the Igbo-American community.

VII. IGBO CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULT MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Princeton in Africa PRESENTED BY Agatha Offorjebe. [See document](#)

VIII. VOCATIONS – IT IS OUR PRIORITY AS CATHOLICS

So he said to his disciples: “The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.” - Matthew 9:37-38

Keeping our beloved communities and chapters open requires keeping them staffed. Every Catholic who loves the Church must pray for, believe in and encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This is not just the job for priests and the religious. Incidentally, evangelization and vocations go hand-in-hand. Vocations grow when we nurture faith, catechism, prayer, and service in children and youth. There is simply no substitute in the Catholic tradition for the priest who consecrates the Eucharist and reconciles the sinner to Christ at the confessional. Because every Catholic relies on priests, every Catholic needs to make prayer for vocations a priority. The permanent diaconate and consecrated life as brothers, sisters, or lay associates contribute immeasurably to the universal church and the common good. Too many Catholics have misconceptions and biases about what a vocation to religious life is like. The same logic that encourages networking, internships, and mentoring for youth who are exploring a secular profession, applies for youth who might consider religious life. Young people need to interact with the clergy and the religious, to see or experience, firsthand, what they do and how they find fulfillment in their work.

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

The ordination of U.S.-born Igbo American and indigenous priests, that is, priests who have a common cultural background with the people to whom they minister, are vital to the long-term work of Igbo Catholic Communities. We need to support priests and seminarians in their vocations and find ways to become more effective at inviting and supporting Igbo Americans to the priesthood. Of course, Igbo bishops begin as Igbo priests. If we would like to see our community reflected in the faces of the bishops' conference of the future, we need to develop vocations to the priesthood, today. We strongly affirm the vital witness of the Igbo-American religious in our faith communities. We commit ourselves to working with Igbo-American Catholic religious sisters and brothers to foster vocations in their respective communities and to supporting them in their apostolic endeavors.

Our faith engaged:

- Because we cherish the celebration of the Eucharist, we take seriously our personal responsibility to pray for and promote vocations to the priesthood.
- We encourage community organizations and individuals to support seminarians through Burse Clubs and seminary development campaigns.
- We commit ourselves to encouraging and supporting our friends and relatives who might be called to be Sisters, Brothers, Deacons or Priests.
- We call on youth directors in chapter and religious communities to reach out to Igbo-American youth, particularly through predominantly Igbo Communities and families and ICCUSA conventions.

- With deep respect and gratitude for the sisters, brothers, and priests who nurtured our faith and character, we commit to being generous in the annual collection for the Retirement Fund for the Religious, typically held in December.
- We strongly urge every Igbo Catholic to consider a generous donation to the congregations of men and women religious who have served and are still serving Igbo-American communities.

IX. GETTING MARRIED AND STAYING MARRIED

“So God created human beings, making them to be like Himself. He created them male and female. . .”
- Genesis 1:27

We affirm the sanctity of marriage, the sacramental bond between a man and a woman. We embrace each and every human being without exception and we are committed to assisting each person to live out his or her life in accordance with the universal call to holiness, rooted in the natural law and the virtue of Christian chastity as that virtue shapes each and every state of life.

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

We stand with the Church in her advocacy of traditional marriage. As Igbo Americans, however, it is of urgent concern that men and women are not staying committed to their Holy Matrimonial vows and have succumbed to challenges leading to divorces. Historically, close family ties have been the foundation of Igbo American life. Therefore, we lament that discords within families have resulted in single-parent situations currently eroding our family foundations. While it could be argued that among Igbo Americans, Catholics are more likely to marry and stay married, nevertheless, divorces are on the rise. We believe that children need the security and guidance of parents committed to each other through marriage. Evidence shows that vocations to the priesthood and religious life often bloom in families where two Catholic parents model lives of selfless commitment. Moreover (and with no intent to diminish or minimize the contributions of any community, young or old, single or married, childless or parenting), our experience will suggest that two-parent families with children are among the most engaged members of many vibrant communities. We also affirm and acknowledge the many programs already in existence that support marriage in the Igbo American Catholic community, such as "family retreats" and what have you.

Our faith engaged:

- Given these convictions, we commit to encouraging our children to reject the sexually permissive culture that pervades and permeates music and other media.
- We encourage Communities to offer programs that support couples getting married (receiving the sacrament of Holy Matrimony) and staying married (living the vocation).

- We see adoption as a life-affirming decision and we call upon all married couples to prayerfully consider their capacity to be a loving and secured family for an Igbo infant or adoptable child.
- We urge Igbo American couples to honor their anniversaries by participating in the annual Mass with Renewal of Vows that chapters typically celebrate in February.

X. THE SOCIAL APOSTOLATE

“The righteous will then answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!’”

- Matthew 25: 37-40

We affirm that the social teachings of the Church are fundamental to Catholicism. The church’s teaching calls us to act in defense of human life and dignity, to act in solidarity with those who are poor or vulnerable, and in all other ways, promote the common good and defend the universal destination of good. That teaching also affirms the grave immorality of racism and any “attitudes of prejudice and bias against any individual for any reason.”

Our perspective as Igbo Americans:

While it is a fact that a lot of Igbo Americans are well educated and gainfully employed, it does not mean all is fine for everyone. There are disparities and some of them are inevitable. It is, however, disheartening because they are indefensible. We believe that as a society, we must recognise our brothers and sisters who are less fortunate, who are unemployed or uninsured, and attend to their needs, as we would do for Christ.

We reject the insidiousness of discrimination in all its forms, as it affects our own people and others. Igbo Americans know how racial profiling offends human dignity. We understand the heroic efforts of mothers and fathers seeking to move out of poverty and provide a better life for their children. We know how incarceration for minor offenses destroys families and communities. So we reject efforts to use nationalism or xenophobia to pitch poor people of different nationalities against each other in the labor market. We stand in solidarity with immigrants seeking a path to full citizenship in the American society.

Our faith engaged:

To promote moral and universal health care, job creation, fair housing, educational opportunities and economic opportunity for all peoples, we will support the advocacy efforts of the USCCB. This includes using conference documents to better understand the issues and organizing our communities to respond to “action alerts” and other invitations to faithful citizenship. We welcome immigrants into our churches, schools, and communities. We support the DREAM Act, Comprehensive Immigration Reform, and the work of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Justice for Immigrants Campaign.

We promote and support prison ministries for men and women along with programs for reform and rehabilitation. We encourage all Igbo American communities to develop effective prison outreach/visitation ministries. We support our brothers and sisters with disabilities and promote programs that highlight the gifts and talents of our differently-abled members.

CONCLUSION

Finally, in gratitude and in celebration of the landmark Convention homily on Evangelization from our Igbo priests, "What We Have Seen and Heard", we conclude the Convention Plan with the same words they used:

“... we turn to Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Igbo American community. She is the Poor Woman and the Bearer of the Word, the first to believe and the first to proclaim the Word. We entrust to her powerful intercession, this work of evangelization within the Igbo community. May our Heavenly Father perfect us, his Church, in faith and love, that we might always and everywhere faithfully witness to the power of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be all honor and glory in the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen

APPENDIX

CONVENTION XI: THE PLAN OF THE YOUTH

Over 175 youth at Convention XI heard presentations on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and participated in workshops and events. We then gathered at the Youth Convention Plan Session to discuss the draft Convention XI Plan of Action. We focused on three sections of the plan: IV. Engage in Community Life and Evangelization; V. Be Faith Informed; and VII. Reach out to the Next Generation.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

We chose to speak about how we, the youth, the future of the church, want to retain our faith and help the youth to grow as a community. Talent shows, outreach programs that concentrate on the mind, body and soul, and more youth activities will keep youth involved in Community life.

THE SON

We chose to speak about the need to have projects of evangelization to spread the Word of God to our youth in the community, by creating youth masses and youth ministries. This is so that we, the youth, can find greater interest in our Communities and remain involved with God our Father. We are the now generation, not the next generation. Brothers and sisters, without the growth of the youth community there will be a decline in our Igbo Catholic community. As the youth, we need to remain strong and strive to bring more people into our church community.

AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

We chose to speak about how we, the youth, want to grow spiritually in our communities by finding a commitment to Jesus through the Word of the Lord, in Bible study. This is so we can develop and satisfy our hunger for the Holy Spirit in our communities. By conducting Bible classes, we will have the opportunity to learn, grow, and live on the Word of the Lord, bringing us closer to the Holy Spirit and growing in our faith.