

**Address To the Igbo Catholic Community USA (ICCUSA) 8th Annual
Convention Held At Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Sacramento,
California April 23rd–April 25th 2010.**

His Lordship, Most. Rev. Jamie Soto, the Bishop of Sacramento and Chairman, Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, office of the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops, His Lordship, Most. Rev. Dr. Callistus Onaga, the Bishop of Enugu, Msgr. Prof. Obiora Ike, Director of the Catholic Institute For Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP) Enugu, Msgr. Dr. Anselm Nwaorgu, ICCUSA National Chaplain, Rev. Dr. Baaju Izuchi, founding President/CEO, African Pastoral Ministers For USA Inc., Sister Joanna Okereke, Coordinator in the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity, office of the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops, Priests and Religious, ICCUSA Executive, National Delegates, Ndi Chief, Ndi Nze, ndi Ozo, distinguished guests, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I welcome you to Sacramento, the site of the 8th annual national convention of the Igbo Catholic Communities in the United States of America.

We have come to Sacramento, the capital of the great state of California to discuss and deliberate many challenges facing the Igbo Catholic Communities in the United States. The issues of maintaining our Catholic faith, our traditional values and inculcating these values to our children in the United States are some of the challenges facing our generation. Just as the previous generations have handed the faith onto us, it is imperative that we do the same, to hand on, not only our cultural traditions and customs, but our faith traditions as well. Another great challenge of our time for our community is that many of our youths and young adults quickly become Americanized and lose some of their cultural heritage due to peer pressure from the dominant culture. This issue of Americanization is not exclusive to our youths but parents too. We too have been influenced by the American culture as evidenced by our insatiable need to accumulate material wealth to live like the “Joneses” big homes in America, big SUVs, big mansion in the village and the big traditional title to go with it. As a result, we work long hours and spend less time with our families. We no longer settle our marital disputes within the church community, our Priests, God parents, our elders, in-laws, rather we resort to the American Judicial System for our problems and the consequences of divorce in our community.

The challenges that I have outlined above requires dialogue among bishops, priests and religious, parents, Igbo leaders, chiefs, delegates, academicians, policy makers and politicians. I am delighted to have all the experts here with us today. Starting with our keynote speaker, Most. Rev. Dr. Callistus Onaga, the Bishop of Enugu who will address the general theme of the convention with emphasis on “Igbo culture and Catholic faith as the core value of the Igbo family”. Msgr. Prof. Obiora Ike, will speak on “The challenges of living the faith at a time of Crisis and Value Disorientation with a focus on youth, young adults and the Igbo Family”. While Msgr. Dr. Anselm Nwaorgu will be speaking on the “Impact of Immigration on the Igbo Family”. I am certain that our expert presenters will

create opportunity for dialogue in our breakout sessions. It is my wish that at the end of our breakout sessions, that we come out with key recommendation and program ideas that delegates and participants will take home that will strengthen our Igbo families.

To parents, it is true that our faith is being expressed in our rich cultural tradition in our Sunday Masses, but more importantly by living out our faith in our homes, spending quality time with our family, will there be a lasting impact on our children. How could we accomplish this when today's economy require both parents to work? Who should spend more time at home with the children? MOM or DAD? I will leave this debate in our breakout session, however, our mothers are the center of our emotional being. Starting from our catechism " Blessed are you among women and Blessed is the fruit of your womb -----" Onye bu nwayi a? Mara ma k'onwa, zegulu ka anyanwu, di egwu ka ndi aha gara ogu----. suffice to say that I have taken the stand that Mothers are the center of our household and they should spend more time at home than at work.

As ICCUSA continues to advocate for the Igbo catholic communities in the United states, and for us to implement the recommendations and programs as a result of this conference, our chapter communities must be strong, demonstrate good leadership, work collaboratively with their chaplains and dioceses. This brings me to the issue of leadership and I will like to reference the speech of His Holiness, the late John Paul 11 on the occasion of the beatification of Father Tansi

"All Nigerians must work to rid society of everything that offends the dignity of the human person or violates human rights. This means reconciling differences, overcoming ethnic rivalries, and injecting honesty, efficiency and competence into the art of governing. (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 111)..... There can be no place for intimidation and domination of the poor and the weak, for arbitrary exclusion of individuals and groups from political life, for the misuse of authority or the abuse of power. In fact, the key to resolving economic, political, cultural and ideological conflicts is justice; and justice is not complete without love of neighbor, without an attitude of humble, generous service". This is so true in some of our communities, therefore, my fellow delegates, Let us go and serve with attitude of humble and generous service rather than be served.

Hosting a national convention is not an easy fit for the Sacramento chapter and I will like to take this time to thank Mr. James Ogbonna, Dr. Sylvester Okonkwo and all the men and women that have worked day and night to make today's event successful. To my predecessor, Mr. Anthony Ikebudu, thank you for going above and beyond the office of the presidency to benefit ICCUSA. Special thanks to our Spiritual Director, Msgr. Dr. Anselm Nwaorgu, Rev. Dr. Nwabuju Izuchi, Sr. Joanna Okereke, your advice and support helped tremendously in shaping my vision for ICCUSA and this year's convention. My special gratitude to Chief/Dr. Paul Amuchie and Chief Goddy Ogor for their wisdom and advice. To the

members of the Executive Committee and delegates, your independent views on matters affecting ICCUSA will continue to contribute to a strong leadership. Finally, to my wife Esochi, thank you for your patience and listening ears on the days when things are not going so well.

The Igbo Catholic Community USA is blessed to have His Lordship, Most. Rev. Jamie Soto accept the invitation to be the Chief celebrant on this very special day for the Igbo community in the United State of America. This is pure demonstration of your solidarity and commitment to the Igbo community and to cultural diversity in the United States Catholic Church. Thank you. To His Lordship, Most. Rev. Dr. Callistus Onaga, Msgr. Prof. Obiora Ike, flying all the way from Nigeria to Sacramento to be the key note speaker and present on this day speaks volume of your commitment to the Igbo faithful and we thank you very dearly. As we end this event, I ask the good Lord to grant each one of you journey mercies back to Nigeria and to your respective states as we look forward to the 2011 convention. Udo diri unu.

Dr. Jude U. Iheoma, President ICCUSA.