

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGIN, GROWTH, AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONGREGATION OF THE MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP OF THE ARCHANGELS SISTERS (MOPHASS)

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Introduction

The salvation of souls has been the primary preoccupation of the Church since her institution by Christ Jesus. That is why an in-depth examination of some dioceses around the world will confirm that there is this pressing necessity for the propagation of the kingdom of God as entrusted to her by Christ Jesus, “Go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, in keeping the bidding of both Gospel imperative to evangelization and which is strongly and profoundly reiterated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, which states: “God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all people should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord, in whom the entire revelation of the Most High God is summed up commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel.”¹ The Church has faithfully adhered to this mandate of

¹ Austin Flannery, *VATICAN COUNCIL II, VOL 1: THE CONCILIAR AND POST CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS*, Costello Publishing Company, 1975, 665.

preaching the Gospel to all nations. She constantly does this through different means. In this paper, I will be looking at one of those ways through which she fulfils this mandate, that is, the establishment of the Institutes of Consecrated life² which has helped greatly in the proclamation of the gospel. These Institutes of Consecrated Life are those associate historical forms of the faithful in which the consecrated life³ finds its concrete realization, and in which are found the indispensable theological and canonical element.”⁴ And the canon complements the definition of Institute of Consecrated Life, which stipulates that the institute must be erected by the competent ecclesiastical authority.⁵ It is therefore a gift⁶ to the Church.

From the early days of the church till date there remains the urgent need for more vocations for the spread of the kingdom of God. Judging by the diversity of peoples and cultures in the world, there is no

2 Institutes of Consecrated Life do not intend to take into consideration the consecrated Life in itself but in as much as the consecrated life is accepted, approved and regulated by the canonical order however the stable form of living the evangelical counsels becomes the states of consecrated life and the faithful who professed the evangelical counsels collectively constitute the institute of consecrated life. So, the consecrated religious life, inasmuch as it is approved by the Church and regulated by her laws, assumes precise institutionalized forms. Canon law today calls such institutionazied forms institute of conected life. (C. 573). The forms of consecrated Life approved by the Church are: Hermits (C. 603), Religious institutes (C. 710), The Order of Virgins (C. 604 S 1) and Societies of Apostolic Life (C. 731 §1) and secular Institutes (C. 710) are described as laws as “approaching Consecrated Life.. John P. Beal, James A. Coriden et al., *New commentary on the Code of Canon Law: An Entirely New and Comprehensive Commentary by Canonists from North America and Europe, with A Revised English Translation of the Code*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 769. Canon 605.

3 The consecrated life is firmly rooted in baptismal consecration but is it not given to all the baptized because consecration of consecrated persons is a deepening of the baptismal consecration already received. The Profession of Evangelical is Central to all consecrated life. The church has long recognized the profession of the evangelical counsels as kind of second baptism a profound insertion into the paschal mystery of Christ. LG 45.

4 Ogun D. Aihmiosion, *Foundation and Canonical Erection of Institute of Consecrated Life*, Romac, 2001, 173.

5 Canon 573§ 2. the Competent Authorities that can erect institute of Consecrated Life are the Supreme Pontiff and the Local Ordinaries (The Diocesan Bishops).

6 From these gifts of the spirit, a wonderful variety of forms of consecrated life have been approved and canonically established by the competent ecclesiastical authority. *Vita Consecrata 5-11 LG 45* each of these forms of consecrated life reflects a particular way of living Christ’s life in obedience to the Father’s will. All manifest the commandment of love and are as branches of the one vine intergrated into the life of the church.*therefore*, consecrated life is like a big tree with different branches (forms) that gives beauty to the Church.

doubt that every society has its own spiritual and material needs.⁷ In the attempt to respond to the various pastoral needs in the particular churches, there has been a continuous emergence and a constant growth of new Institutes of Consecrated Life of men and women, the majority of which are founded by the Local Ordinaries of the places. It is without question that the response to each pastoral need that the Holy Spirit awakens in the faithful is a representation of Christ to the world in His love for humanity, for whose sake He became incarnate, to lead all people back to God the Father.

Interestingly, “both the Magisterium and theologians affirm that the Community of Consecrated Life arises in the Church as the initiative of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues to act in the Church, constantly bestowing His manifold gifts on the people of God, gifts not limited to time, place, or culture.”⁸ “Two millennia after the first Pentecost, the Lord continues to enrich His Church with new gifts for her continuous sanctification and in response to the needs of peoples everywhere. Some of these gifts are translated into forms of Consecrated Life through the profession of the evangelical counsels, and lived in the Institute of Consecrated Life.”⁹

This is why, upon the episcopal ordination of our Bishop, Most Rev Gabriel G. Dunia, filled with that pastoral zeal and faithfulness to the mandate entrusted to the Church, and he was inspired¹⁰ to found a Religious Congregation to continue in the holiness of the life of the Church (consecrated life) in the Diocese of Auchi. Members of this Congregation are to join in the mission of the Church, through their works of evangelization and to inspire the people towards higher spiritual values by their life.”¹¹

7 Ogun D. Aihmiosion, *Foundation and Canonical Erection of Institute of Consecrated Life*, Romae, 2001, 1.

8 Ogun D. Aihmiosion, *Foundation and Canonical Erection of*. 1.

9 Ogun D. Aihmiosion, *Foundation and Canonical Erection of*. 1.

10 We should note here according to Ogun Aihmiosion in his book “*Foundation and Canonical Erection of Institute of Consecrated Life*” that, the inspiration could be through extraordinary or charismatic forms (vision, an inner voice) or through the ordinary daily experiences of life. It could even be through a long process of mature reflection also it could have been suggested by someone else (a bishop or confessor) to the founder.

¹¹ Edwin Omorogbe, “Ut Unum Sint: A Canonical Reflection on the Episcopal Motto of Archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu”, in Anselm Jimoh, Anthony Igbekele et al, *Faithful Service and Witness in the Church: Celebrating Four Great Men of Bodija*, Kraft Books Limited, SS Peter and Paul Catholic Major Seminary, 2021, 240.

The Nature of Auchi Diocese

Auchi Diocese is at the home front of the Gospel in Afemai land.¹² Afemai is an ethnic group of people living in the northern part of Edo State, South geographical zone of Nigeria. Afemai people occupy six local government areas of Edo State: Etsako East, Etsako Central, Etsako West, Owan East, Owan West, and Akoko Edo. These make up the Edo North Senatorial District. Afemai ethnic group is divided into different dialects but the people generally speak to and understand each other.¹³ The local Church in Auchi Diocese was carved out from Benin Archdiocese on 6th November 2002 and was canonically inaugurated on 22nd February 2003. The current Bishop, Most Rev Gabriel G. Dunia is the pioneer Bishop of the Diocese. Auchi diocese as it were, is the herald of the Catholic Christian message and carries the seed of the gospel's culture.¹⁴

The Founding of MOPHASS Congregation

It is in light of this that our Bishop, Most Rev Gabriel Ghieakhomo Dunia, the Catholic Bishop of Auchi Diocese developed a keen interest in inviting Religious¹⁵ Congregations to help in perpetuating the faith in the Diocese because a very high percentage of the indigenes were mostly Muslims and pagans. He was, however, unwilling to immediately invite Religious Congregations because the Diocese did not have the resources to meet the demands of some interested Congregations that applied to be allowed to work in the Diocese. As a result of that, he decided that at the right time he would establish a diocesan Congregation that can adapt to the environment and will be willing to accept and work in the rural parts

12 Francis Ikhianosime, "the Catholic Faith and Afemai Culture: The Imperative of Inculturation In Auchi Diocese" in *Our People our Faith: The Afemai people In Perspective*, vol 1, Dasan 2011, 65.

13 Francis Ikhianosime, " the Catholic Faith and Afemai Culture: 63.

14 Francis Ikhianosime, " the Catholic Faith and Afemai Culture: 65.

15 The word Religious according to Thomas Aquinas, the application of the word to all consecrated persons will not be completely unacceptable, insofar as all practice the evangelical counsels. Also, Aquinas went further to qualify those who could be called religious as people who through solemn vows dedicated themselves completely to God through the practice of the evangelical counsels (Cf. *Summa II IIa c;*) and which was applied to groups that were founded much later.

of the Diocese in order to get in touch with the people through some of the already established schools, hospitals, and other diocesan Institutions. This idea he often communicated to some of his indigenous priests and religious.

In 2007, one of the Sisters, Rev Sr. Maryann Anazostena Ogwokhademhe of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus' Sisters, happened to come in contact with a sister, Sr Harriet Kelechi Okere who was a member of secular Institutes searching for a religious congregation to join. She advised her to visit her Diocese (Auchi) that her Bishop had the intention of starting a Religious Congregation.

On December 27, 2007, Sr Harriet Kelechi Okere met with the Bishop who vividly told her that he was not ready yet to establish a Congregation but she could stay in the Diocese to assist in one of the schools pending the time he would be ready. She agreed and was interviewed by the Catholic Education Board in January 15, 2008. After this assessment, the board found her fit to manage one of the schools in the Diocese and she was assigned to "St Anthony Catholic Centre" Imiegba in the North Ibie land. She lived in a house provided by a parishioner (Pa Ekhelar) of St Anthony Catholic Church, Imiegba for a short while.

Amazingly, her presence in that community attracted many people and these people started communicating with her. Both Sr. MaryAnn Ogwokhademhe and her started inviting young girls interested in the religious life (aspirants) to come and work in the Diocese pending the time the Bishop would officially decide to finally establish the longed proposed Religious Congregation. Those aspirants that came were posted to five (5) various schools in the remote parts of the Diocese such as Imiegba, Igarra, Imoga, Okpekpe, and Iviukwe.

Nevertheless, at that time, it was not easy for the aspirants due to some factors like the absence of telecommunication network, bad roads, no houses of their own, they were all living in people's houses. Some of the aspirants could not cope with the working conditions, so they left while the other aspirants did not give up on hope despite the presence of those factors militating against the spread of the gospel message they were faced with in the Diocese that was still developing. The few aspirants who stayed behind knew that, "Rome was not built in a day." They worked so hard in

their respective places of assignments. It was at this point that the schools where the aspirants were managing started recording tremendous increase in population and success in academics.

As a result of this, the Bishop of the Diocese was encouraged by the positive reports he got about the aspirants from some of his priests in the parishes and schools where the aspirants were working. On April 22, 2008, an interview was conducted by the Bishop himself with two of his priests; Very Rev Fr Mark Akhigbe and Rev Fr Ignatius Omonagbe for the aspirants, to adjudge their suitability and intention for the religious life. After that interview, thirteen (13) of the aspirants were accepted and officially received as postulants. This first group, thus began formation in the Diocese. They were: Harrieth kelechi Okere, Elizabeth Eze, Josephine Ngozi Nwosu, Felicitas Eberechukwu Mbaeze, Catherine Nwana, Ifeoma Osuchukwu, Angelina Opara, Gloria Amusi, Immaculata Ngozichukwu Njom, Elizabeth Okomayin, Rosemary Odion, Veronica Nkiruka Ebue and Eucharika Amadi,

At this stage, the present coordinator, Rev. Sr. Maryann Ogwokhademhe who was then at Enugu was assisting and encouraging the sisters in one way or the other. She kept on working hard for the full actualization and establishment of the diocesan Religious Congregation. Our Founder¹⁶ Father the Bishop, being a Marian Bishop and highly principled really wanted those who can persevere like Our Mother Mary, those that can stand the test of time, humble, willing, and able to work for Christ through the formation that will be given to them.

So, on April 15, 2010, he invited the University Sisters of Assumption to come and assist him in the Novitiate formation. The Congregation sent Rev. Sr. Anthonia Anoliefo (USOA) as a Novice Directress. Nine (9) out of the thirteen (13) postulants: Harriet kelechi Okere, Elizabeth Eze, Josephine Ngozi Nwosu, Angelina Opara, Gloria

16 A founder is the derivative of the English verb Found, which has its root in the Latin '*fundare*'. To found means to bring into being, to set up or establish something such as society, institution and the like. So, a founder for an institute of consecrated life is a person who gives existence not only as a fact of history but also who conceives and defines the institute in its characteristic features as well as orders its life and action. That is, he must be the bearer of an original inspiration. To a certain extent, he must be the artificer of its realization, giving a certain code or rule of life, forming its first members and possibly its governmental structure, as well as constituting its specific purpose.

Amusi, Immaculata Ngozi Njom, Elizabeth Okomayin, Rosemary Edeghonghon Odion and Veronica Nkiruka Ebue(late) commenced their formation.

The first nine sisters had their first religious profession on the 27th of August 2011, while the second group comprised Felicitas Eberechukwu Mbaeze, Catherine Mary Nwana, Eucharika Onyekachi Amadi, Perpetual Ekperi, Factoye Patricia, and Veronica Inalegwu. Six of them were received into the Novitiate and they had their first profession on the 7th of October 2012.

The Name, Nature and Purpose of the Congregation

Due to the progress recorded in a short time by the Congregation as a result of the intercession of our Mother of Perpetual Help, the Congregation was established by the Bishop and he named it, *Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels' Sisters (MOPHASS)*. The name because our consecration is total “yes” to God like Mary-Mother of Perpetual Help, and like the Archangels; the sisters strive to be true messengers and ambassadors of God to the world. The Sisters of the Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels are therefore to carry out the Divine will of God through the maternal patronage of Mother of Perpetual Help, and like her, be docile to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Also, through our Mother of Perpetual Help, they could be of constant help to others in the pastoral and social work done in the Congregation.

The Congregation was established as a Religious Association for Faithful Women who aspire to become Religious in the Institute of Consecrated Life of the Diocesan Right for and in the Diocese of Auchi. They have been set apart for a unique vocation in the Church. They set out to follow Christ with greater liberty and to imitate him more closely by practicing the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty, and Chastity.¹⁷ Members of this female Religious Congregation come from diverse cultures and ethnicity.

The end or purpose of the Association is the unfailing and unfading spirit of readiness to cultivate and perpetuate the ageless love of

¹⁷ Flannery A, ed., The Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents, Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis* no 1.

God and its eternal beauty in Christianity. This Spirit aims at the effective and efficient transformation of a particularly fragmented and variegated community of people in and for whom the Diocese of Auchi has been created. In the midst of precariously entrenched and diverse beliefs, a Religious Congregation of this kind of Spirit could not have been more timely and necessary. In other words, it aims at the perpetual, indomitable fortification of the love of God as it shines out in the spirituality of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. The sisters are not motivated by honours, titles, money, or enjoyment rather they carry out their mission in faith and love for Christ. Therefore, in responding to the call of God, they become instruments of God's love, in recognizing that their mission is at one with that of the Church and Christ.¹⁸ The congregation has two principal feastdays; Mother of Perpetual Help (June 27) and The Archangels (September 29).

The Spirituality, Character and Charism of the Congregation

The Congregation has its spirituality as “CHRISMARIANITY.” The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, is the consummate, Proclaimer, Presenter, the Translated Translator of Christ, with and in all her life without any reservation. This we learn from her total surrendering of her will to the will of God in Christ Jesus, her Son: *Ecce Ancilla Domini*—I am the handmaid of the Lord; *Fiat Mihi Secundum Verbum Tuum*—Let it be done to me according to your word (Lk 1: 38). This **Chrismarianity**, that is, Christ’s incarnation in the Blessed Virgin Mary in all her Life and doings prepared her to be merited to unite her will totally with the will of her son, Jesus Christ.¹⁹

This will of Jesus Christ is the same as the entire will of the Most Blessed Trinity to redeem the entire humanity as it was foretold: *Ecce Venio*- Behold I Come. *Facere Voluntatem Tuam, Deus Meus, Volui*-- to willingly do your will, my God (Psalm 40:8-9). It is quite clear from the scripture that the entire life of the Blessed Virgin Mary (her will and

¹⁸ Gabriel G. Dunia, the Provisional Constitution of the Congregation of Mother of Perpetual. 1.

¹⁹ Gabriel G. Dunia, the Provisional Constitution of the Congregation of Mother of Perpetual.1.

actions) for all eternity has been translated into the entire life of her Son, Jesus Christ.

So, the entire life (will, actions and doings) of the Blessed Virgin Mary which is translated into that of Christ is inculcated into the minds and hearts of the members of the Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels Sisters a luminous Charismarianity that must therefore permeate or impregnate, deliver and mature in the heart and mind of every member of the Congregation. “In the Blessed Virgin Mary, we also find a Mother who is altogether unique. Indeed, the motherhood conferred on Mary at Calvary is a gift for all Christians and most importantly, it has a specific value for those who have completely consecrated their lives to Christ.”²⁰

MOPHASS congregation has the character or spiritual characteristics which flow from the spirit of the Blessed Virgin Mary as earlier described. In professing and living the evangelical counsels, fully, the authentic communal life is highly prized, following and staying with Jesus always and everywhere is held with satisfaction, confidently asking and helping for an unfailing reception of anything asked according to the will of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. In this way, the MOPHASS prayers are prayed in the way and manner the Most Holy Trinity would want them prayed with the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this perspective, every devotion, adoration and all kinds of apostolate are all initiated and done in the way and manner the Most Holy Trinity would want them to be initiated and carried out in and through the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.²¹

In every religious institution, “there is a need for fidelity to the founding charism²² and subsequent spiritual heritage of the institute. It is this fidelity to the inspiration of the founder and foundress, inspiration which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into

²⁰ *Vita Consecrata* No. 46.

²¹ Gabriel G. Dunia, the Provisional Constitution of the Congregation of Mother of Perpetual. 2.

²² Charism is gift (*Charisma*) in the spirit of the founder. Each institute has a charism which is unique and distinct. Its Charism is its distinctive manner provided for its members to live out their profession of vow. L. G 712.

practice.”²³ In every charism, there is predominantly “a profound desire to be conformed to Christ to give witness to some aspects of his mystery.”²⁴ “This specific aspect is meant to take shape and develop according to the most authentic tradition of the institute, as present in its rules, constitutions, and statutes.”²⁵

Hence, the Auchi Diocesan Congregation (MOPHASS) has its Charism therefore as TOTAL SURRENDERING OF THE WILL TO THE ETERNAL WILL OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY, ONE GOD so that like the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the members will be perpetually and unfailingly always and everywhere be available and willing to serve the entire human race in all the apostolate of the Congregation.

The Habit of the Congregation

“Religious are to wear the habit of the institute, made according to the norm of proper law, as a sign of their consecration and as a witness to poverty.”²⁶ The Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels Sisters wear their habit at all times. For official occasions, such as ordinations, religious professions and on Sundays, they wear the white habit. At other times, they may wear either the white or blue habit at their discretion.

The habit is pleated with mini scapular joined to the center pleats of the skirt in both front and back. The scapular serves as a shield or mantle of protection by our Mother Mary. The three pleatings at each side of the skirt in both front and back as a reminder of the Charism of the Congregation "The Eternal Will of the Most Holy Trinity". The side Rosary as a sword, the powerful weapon of true daughter of Mary. The red and blue cord worn on the neck on blue and white habit remind us of our Lady's purity of heart with an insignia of the full image of Mother of Perpetual Help as a sign of her perpetual succor.

²³ *Vita Consecrata*, 63.

²⁴ CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES AND CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae Relationes* 14th May, 1978, 51.

²⁵ *Vita Consecrata* 63.

²⁶ Canon 669 & 1.

The Development and Growth of the Congregation

Within the space of about thirteen years of the establishment of this female Religious Congregation in the Diocese of Auchi, it has expanded and recorded immense successes. We shall therefore proceed to look at the Congregation's growth and input in the Diocese of Auchi and beyond.

The congregation as of now has spread and established its communities in almost all parts of the diocese and beyond the diocese. Presently, MOPHASS reside in fifteen communities in the Diocese of Auchi, namely: Imiegba, Okpekepe, Afashio, Igarra, Iviukwe, Agenebode, Ivhiukwua, Fugar, Sabo-Iyakpi, Afuze, Anegbette, Irakhor, Eme-Ora, and Auchi. Also on a mission outside the Diocese of Auchi are two communities in Gboko, Benue State and a community in Otukpo Diocese.

From nine foundation members, the religious sisters of the Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels have since risen to Seventy-one (71) professed sisters. Fourteen among them are finally professed. The first set of finally professed sisters were seven in number and the occasion took place at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral Auchi on the 25th of August 2018. While the second and recent one also took place at the same venue on the 3rd of September 2022 with a total number of seven (7) finally professed sisters.

Postulancy and Novitiate Houses

The postulancy²⁷ or Pre-Novitiate period is done in the Postulate house. It is a stage of initial formation which precedes and prepares the postulant for entry into the Novitiate. The Postulant is guided by the Directress of Postulant. The Novitiate, "a preparation for life in the institute, is an intense period of formation characterized by initiation into its life, mission, spirituality, and history; personal configuration to the

²⁷ By postulanship is meant a time of probation which is preliminary to the novitiate. It is intended to give superiors an opportunity to observe the candidates and the candidates an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the general obligations of the religious life. CC. 539-541.

paschal mystery, and discernment regarding the Novice's vocation to religious life in this particular institute”²⁸ under the assistance of Novice Directress in the Novitiate house.

Thus, the Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels Sisters Congregation has made a temporary provision of two Formation Houses for training her members in various stages of formation; Postulancy and Novitiate programmes at Iviukwe Agenebode and Afashio Uzairue, respectively. This is to assist the young women who join the Congregation to grow in the manner of the Congregation, form their minds and hearts in its spirit, and test their resolution and suitability.

MOPHASS on Further Studies and Entrepreneurial Skills

The Congregation in her strides to equip her members, has got a number of trained personnels in various professions through formal and informal education. She has more than twenty of her members in both Conventional and Non-Conventional Universities within the country such as University of Benin (UNIBEN), Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Veritas University Abuja (VUNA), University of Calabar (UNICAL), Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), School of Midwifery, Catholic Diocese of Auchi, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Imo State University (IMSU), Edo State University, Uzairue etc. Nonetheless, . MOPHASS in her effort to properly carter for her needs and build a financial capacity for Sustainable development also prepares her members in acquisition of various skills like Tailoring, catering services, fishery, poultry, baking, production of candles for all liturgical celebrations and household products like: oitment, insecticide, detergent, etc.

Apostolates Undertaken By the MOPHASS

The MOPHASS has as her major apostolate to live out her vows in communities so that their apostolic effort will bear more spiritual fruit in the degree that they are living in line with the gospel and the evangelical counsels.²⁹ The Congregation is also missionary as such the sisters are

²⁸ Canon 646.

²⁹ Gabriel G. Dunia, *the Provisional Constitution of the Congregation of Mother of Perpetual*. 1.

willing to offer themselves to be sent out by the Institutes to places where there are needs for their service.³⁰ Therefore, the sisters actively carry out the following apostolate in the Catholic Diocese of Auchi, though not just restricted to these apostolates. These apostolates include: school apostolates, medical services, social services, pastoral assistance, and evangelical witnessing.

1. School Apostolate

Right from the time of the advent of the Church in Nigeria, the Catholic Church has made a lot of contributions in the area of education. This was considered the fastest and best means of evangelization and remains so even till today in spite of the government take-over of schools. Remarkably, the early missionaries effectively converted the people to the Christian religion through the provision of education for them. Thus education did not only make an impact through the qualitative growth of the church but even the actual quantitative growth. In present-day Nigeria, there is no doubt that most of the important dignitaries of the nation including Bishops and priests are products of Catholic missionary schools and most of these schools were and are still being managed by consecrated women.³¹ In this light, knowing the importance of education, MOPHASS Congregation has continued to teach and manage diocesan schools in order to keep this aspect of the Church alive and making it wax stronger day by day. It has been observed that parents often withdraw their children from other schools in order to enroll them in the schools where the indigenous religious sisters teach. It is through institutes of education that the MOPHASS have been able to inculcate Catholic Faith and doctrine, discipline, and good morals in children. The aim of the indigenous sisters (MOPHASS) is to teach, train and instruct their pupils and students in such a way as to meet the challenges of the secular and spiritual life and not just simply to obtain the certificate. The sisters extend their teaching apostolate to a special school for the physically challenged such as the dumb which is located in Ogbona.

³⁰ Gabriel G. Dunia, the provisional Constitution of the Congregation of Mother of Perpetual. 4.

³¹ Agnes I. Acha, "Consecrated Women and their Contribution to the growth of the church in Nigeria", in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* June 2009 Vol. 23, CATIAN, 89.

Schools Established By the MOPHASS

Being a young growing Institute, she has founded and established schools that cater for the need of the young minds in fulfilment of her spirit and her charism. The various schools with the name Mother of Perpetual Help Nursery/Primary schools are situated at Iviukwua, Ebelle and Uzairue.

2. Medical Apostolate

Through the Medical apostolate, our indigenous religious sisters, (MOPHASS) participate in the healing work of Christ. They serve the sick, the suffering, and the agonizing with great love and concern. They devotedly attend to all who need medical attention without any form of discrimination. At present, the MOPHASS in Auchi Diocesan Health Institution: Sancta Maria catholic hospitals at Sancta Maria Hospital, Uzairue, and Sancta Maria Hospital, Agenebode.

Social Services Rendered by the MOPHAS

Through crucial social services, religious women imitate and actualize the love, empathy, and concern of Christ as they serve the under-privileged in parishes and others. They serve the material well-being of all without discrimination. So, the MOPHASS are actively rendering social services in the diocese and likewise working in Diocesan Media, Justice Development Peace Commission (JDPC), offices, among others.

3. Pastoral Ministry

Bearing in mind that the young ones are the solid foundation upon which a strong local church is built, MOPHASS painstakingly organize catechism classes for children in order to give them moral instructions and inculcate in them sound religious discipline. They meticulously care for the spiritual well-being of all people. The MOPHASS' duty in the parish is not likewise reduced to the making of the altar, rather they engaged in

collaborative ministry with the clergy and the laity. Also, they help in the pastoral programmes of the Diocese.

4. Authentic Life of Witnessing

More than simply the oral preaching of the gospel, consecrated women contribute in a significant way to the growth of the Church by living a life of authentic witnessing. This fulfils the words of Pope Paul VI when he noted that rather than needing more teachers, the modern man and woman need authentic witnesses to the love of God in Christ.³² The MOPHASS preach without the use of words alone and testify without calling attention on themselves to the primary place of the divine in their daily life. This is because the most obligatory apostolate is that of a good example. Giving good examples is a powerful form of witnessing, which in turn is nourished and experienced through prayers, union with God, and the spirit of penance³³ people nowadays prefer to ‘see’ sermons rather than just hear them. In line with that, Pope Paul VI said that “modern man listens more to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are also witnesses.”³⁴

MOPHASS Deceased Sisters

The Congregation has lost two of her members in ghastly motor accidents in March 2018 and in January 2021. They are Rev Sr. Veronica Nkiruka Ebue and Rev Sr. Dr. Maureen Agbanu of the blessed memory. Their memories will forever remain green. May God rest their Souls. Amen.

32 Agnes I. Acha, “Consecrated Women and their Contribution to the growth of the church in Nigeria” 88.

33 AWAGWU, M. G., *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, Port Harcourt 2008, 110.

34 PAUL VI, *address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity*, 1974.

Conclusion

All these we do in loving response to Christ, who has called us and sent us to cooperate with his own redemptive preaching and acting eagerly and tirelessly to bring men and women of our time, the saving truth which Jesus Christ revealed to us and the saving grace which he owns for us. This growth and development of the MOPHASS Congregation is nothing short of the work of God who gave growth to a seed that was sown in prayers, the holiness of life, humility, and other services in his vineyard. The Congregation has continued to expand in different forms of apostolates and rendering invaluable evangelical and missionary services throughout the Diocese of Auchi and in some other parts of Nigeria. So, through the intercession of our Mother of Perpetual Help, the growth of our Congregation has been unstoppable.

We thank God for the gift of our Founder Father, Most Rev Dr. G.G.Dunia for his unflinching efforts to ensure that this Association grows and develops to its fullness. Also worthy to be noted are the efforts of the coordinator, Rev Sr. Maryann Ogwokhademhe, and the foundation members who have stood firm to make the Congregation what it is today and still labouring for the Congregation to reach a complete stage of Diocesan Right and Pontifical Right, God willing.

It is the Lord's doing and we keep praying for God's protection on the Founder, and the Coordinator, and also for His insight, wisdom, and perseverance on all sisters of the Mother of Perpetual Help of the Archangels (MOPHASS) as they carry out this mission of perpetuating the ageless love of God and its eternal beauty in Christianity throughout the world.

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