THE GENESIS

Akokwa Monastery Story

The events that led to the establishment of the Monastery as it is today, began with the devotional prayer visit to Awhum Monastery by Mrs. Mary Comfort Ezenna way back in the early seventies; that was soon after the Nigeria-Biafra war ended.

There at Awhum she met Mr. Chukwuma a native of Umuopara Akokwa who then was just fresh entrant to the Monastery, though he was later ordained priest. Mrs. Ezenna at that time had the habit of taking her son Kelvin Okechukwu along when going to Awhum.

When Kelvin later took to the priestly vocation he continued going to the Monastery. It was during those visits that the idea of founding a Monastery in Akokwa was born. When Rev. Fr. Chukwuma was presented with the proposal, he made it clear that a Monastery is a big institution requiring more than mere discussion to establish it; there has to be a vast expanse of land, adequate funding, and committed work force, all put together in prayer to bring it about.

Rev. Fr, Kelvin Okechukwu went to work to get committed persons to come together to create the institution, Kelvin approached his elder brother, a most willing philanthropist, *Omereoha* Chief Tony Ezenna, the CEO Orange Drugs Ltd., who quickly understood the benefits of a Monastery. Omereoha needed no convincing for a number of reasons; his mother Mrs. Mary Comfort had always told him years back how God readily answered the prayers she said at the Monastery in Awhum. He on his part had wished at that time that if he had the money he will work to have a branch of the Monastery sited near their home so that people in the village may afford to go to the Monastery at little cost. He too was no stranger to the benefits of Monasteries as he and his family have been guests to Monasteries abroad. So when he was approached by his brother Rev. Fr. Ezenna and Rev. Fr. Chukwuma to facilitate the establishment of the Monastery it was like a dream come true.

Omereoha wasted no time in taking the opportunity to actualize his desire. He sought the approval of His Lordship the Bishop of Orlu diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Gregory O. Ochiagha to have a Monastery sited in his diocese in Akokwa. His responsibility was to fund the project. This responsibility Omereoha gladly accepted and deployed resources for the take off.

The next task was where to find a vast piece of land in Akokwa. Owerre Akokwa became the natural choice as the prospect of getting a vast piece of land there was favourable. Rev. Frs. Chukwuka, Ezenna, and Justin Odurukwe took a surveyed tour of Akokwa and a suitable site approved by Fr. Chukwuka was found.

Rev. Fr. Justin Odurukwe, then Parish Priest of St. David's Catholic Church in Owerre Akokwa took on the task of scouting for land owners in the chosen area. The area is known as and called Ikpagha Land by the people of Umuoji, Owerre Akokwa. His announcement to his congregation that the project is slated to be sited in Owerre Akokwa was well received. Those of his congregation who have land in the area chosen indicated their willingness to negotiate. Agreements were reached with them and payments were made. One family worthy of mention offered their land free of charge and refused any payment for it. It is Simon Emenike family.

Construction work began in the project site in the year 1999 and the first buildings were erected. Soon thereafter the tempo of work slowed until it stopped when Rev. Fr. Justin Odurukwe traveled abroad. For a few years everything stood still. Nothing was happening. The site was overgrown with weeds.

Worried that the project had stood at stand still for months and years, Mrs. Mary Comfort Ezenna began to make consultants that renewed the interest in the project. The suitability of the existing structure on site was questioned. It was then that she undertook tours of several Monasteries to obtain designs and models that would be adapted to set this Monastery. She took on herself the expensive and necessary task of getting the essential details of what a Monastery should be. She had to undertake visits to various Monasteries in Nigeria and abroad. She spent days and weeks in these Monasteries praying and observing the physical structures and their functionalities.

Apart from Our Lady of Mount Calvary Cistercian Monastery in Awhum where the story began she was in the Monastery at Ewu in Delta State. She went to the Benedictine Monastery in Nike, Enugu State and GIP Monastery near Lekki Island in Lagos State. She later traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland to the Monastery where Blessed Fr. Tansi lived and worked. She spent days there assisted by her son Valentine Kenechukwu who by the grace of God is studying in Scotland. They took several pictures, asked useful questions, and came home equipped with functional details.

Part of Mrs. Ezenna's effort to resuscitate activities was to apply to Rev. Fr. Chukwuka at Awhum to assign a Monk that would be resident in Akokwa to spur construction effort. The Monk by name Bro. Vincent Okoli was assigned. He worked for one year before he went for further studies.

During Bro Vincent Okoli's period, the living/guest quarters and few other service buildings were put in place. An Abbey came to be established in Akokwa headed by Rev. Fr. Chukwuka.

Work in the construction effort increased and seven Monks were sent from Auhum in September 2006. This marked the beginning of a functional branch in Akokwa. It is to the Glory of God that we have today in reality this great institution that a few years ago began as a far fetched dream.

Special thanks go His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Gregory O. Ochiagha for permitting the establishment of the Monastery; to Rev. Fr. Kelvin Okechukwu Ezenna who facilitated the birth of the Monastery; to Rev. Fr. Justin Odurukwe whose effort encouraged the acquisition of the site; to Omereoha Tony Ezenna, Ikenga Akokwa, who alone paid for the vast land acquired, the buildings erected, the various expenses incurred in realizing the project, and to Mrs. Mary Comfort Ezenna

whose prayer and tireless effort God accepted by establishing a Monastery in Akokwa.

It has to be observed that the vast area of land already purchased has not all been fenced.

Great thanks is being given to God that today in Akokwa He has built a great citadel of prayer to the glory of His name. This great institution was opened in December 2006. on the 1st of January 2007 Chief Tony Ezenna, Omereoha and Ikenga of Akokwa, living up to his name handed the keys to the erections in the Monastery and the documents of title to the vast land of the site to His Lordship the Bishop of Orlu diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Gregory O. Ochiagha, in the presence of the Abbot of the mother Monastery, Rt. Rev. Dominic Cyprain Doghudje of Our Lady of Mount Calvary Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, Enugu State, Nigeria in a solemn ceremony the Mass. But Omereoha was not done yet for on that occasion realizing that an institution of the size of the Monastery require a lot of provisions to function, gave to it the free gift of the sum of N10,000,000.00 (Ten million naira) and a brand new Toyota Hi-Lux jeep for its logistic needs.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

Dated the 10th day of March 2007.

Signed:

MRS. MARY COMFORT EZENNA