

## **“YOUR LAW IS MY DELIGHT” (Ps. 119:77)**

### **“Iwu Gị na-atọ M Ụtọ” (Psalm 119: 77)**

Address of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke, to the CADEK Presbyterium on the Meeting of September 3, 2025 at St. Joseph Cathedral Underground Hall, Ekwulobia for the Personnel Placement for the 2025/2026 Pastoral Year

Very Rev. Msgri. & dear Frs.,

#### **1. Preamble**

We have prayed for the repose of our brothers who had been called to the Lord in the 2024/2025 Pastoral Year that is ending. In the order of their exit, they are Rev. Frs. Clement Onyemelukwe, Philip Ofojebe and Very Rev. Msgr. Jerome Madueke. May they continue to rest in peace!

We just laid Msgr. Jerome to rest yesterday. Let me linger a bit longer on his life. I am sure that all of us know and appreciate his singleness of purpose, his dedication and total self-gift for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Our prayer is that God may raise for us more people with such attitude and disposition. In his memory, as already announced during his funeral yesterday, I have extended the Year for Men and Fathers by one year. He had laboured so hard to put together the book to facilitate our reflections on Men and Fathers and to get it out. The least we can do to commemorate his last major work is to devote enough time to digest and implement the ideas and visions proposed in the book. I hereby entrust the organization of this second phase of the Year for Men and Fathers to the chaplains of the Laity Council, the C.M.O, C.W.O and the Chancellor. Once more, I beg you to ensure that Msgr. Jerome’s last major work bears abundant harvest. As we celebrate the Year for Men and Fathers, I call for volunteers to prepare the material for the celebration of the Year for Women and Mothers in the 2026/2027 Pastoral Year. Any volunteer should feel free to indicate to me or to the Chancellor before the end of this pastoral year ending in October, 2025. At his funeral yesterday, I renamed our Maranatha School of Theology to St. Jerome School of Theology to capture our desire to follow in the footsteps of Very Rev. Msgr. Jerome Ndubuisi Madueke in living the faith and propagating it. We can already see the vacuum created by Msgr.’s death. We are however confident that God who called him, will provide us with those to take over the kind of work he was doing in His vineyard.

#### **2. “Your Law is my Delight”**

I want to address you about law and order. The near absence of these is the bane of the Nigerian society. We are children of our society. Lawlessness and disorder are surreptitiously creeping into our lives, our activities and our mode of organizing the diocese, parish and pastoral work in general. We must not allow this because we are called to redeem the times (Eph 5:16).

One sure help to navigate diversity and forestall conflict is to be guided by laid down laws, norms, principles, procedures, and agreements. I share the view of St. Thomas Aquinas that laws are not arbitrary impositions but ordinances of reason for the common good made by someone who has care of the community. (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I – II, q. 90, a.4. *Quaedam ordinatio rationis ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communitatis, habet promulgata*). Laws lay down rules of engagement, define expectations, assign roles, and delineate timelines and boundaries. For example, when there is a policy/procedure about the tenure of a pastor or parochial vicar and this is largely applied, with reasonable exceptions, every priest would know when he would be due for transfer. In such a system, people feel respected as adults. The organization is perceived as running according to an *episteme* or rationality, and not according to the whim and caprice of a chancery officer. Examples can be multiplied where the valorization of the rule of law enhances cohesion, collaboration, and unity in the diversity of persons and talents at the disposal of the Church.

The interesting thing about laws is that they are supposed to bind those who made them. Once a law is made, those who made them, become subject to them, *ceteris paribus*. The law becomes supreme. This is to create a level playfield for everyone. Where there is rule of law, where there is law and order, expectations are always already spelt out. One needs only to educate oneself on what the law has spelt out, uphold or apply them. This limits arbitrariness and rule by the whims and caprices of the powerful.

Unfortunately, in our society, everyone is the law unto himself or herself. At the flash of some naira notes, a gateman, policeman and other state functionary is ready to upturn the law or the stipulation. Nigeria is, however, not an exception. Solon, the ancient Greek statesman and lawmaker, said that laws are like cobwebs that catch small flies, but which bigger flies break through. Every society, group and institution is faced with the challenge of strengthening its system to withstand such attempts to subvert its laws.

Recall that one of the first things we did after the creation of our diocese is the promulgation of *Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia (CADEK) Policies and Procedures*. The Constitution of almost all the statutory bodies have been promulgated. These documents are available to all – priests and lay people alike. This is to make sure that everyone is at the same page; that everyone knows the laid down rules. Unfortunately, some of us have made themselves laughing stock by ascribing to themselves powers which the lay faithful know they do not have. Imagine a parish priest threatening members of the parish pastoral council that he is not bound to call them to a meeting. They know if you are administering their finances as stipulated in the Diocesan Policy or not. They

may not confront you. You may be very honest but there is a lingering question as regards why you choose to bypass the laid down procedures.

In the light of the above, I challenge all the newly ordained priests and indeed all of you, to provide yourselves with copies of the *CADEK Policies and Procedures* and the Constitutions of the Statutory Bodies. Study them and try to abide by their provisions. This will spare you a lot of embarrassments. I also direct that an introduction to the *CADEK Policies and Procedures* becomes part of the programme for the orientation of deacons and newly ordained priests. May my chancery staff and the chaplains of the statutory bodies ensure that the *CADEK Policies and Procedures* and the Constitutions of groups respectively, are in circulation and that people are encouraged to buy and read them. May we strive to administer whatever thing or group entrusted to us according to laid down laws. Disregard of the laws and guiding principles of a society is the condition of possibility of corruption. We cannot criticize what is happening in the larger society while ourselves being guilty of the same vice.

### **3. The Diocesan Curia**

As a young diocese, we have the advantage of setting things up according to the stipulations of Canon Law and Magisterium of the Church. As you can see, as a Bishop I am not free to do as I like. There are laid down procedures. I want to share with you some insights into how the Bishop is supposed to set up a diocese for two reasons. First, not long ago, I met someone who was, for several years, the Vicar General of a Diocese. Yet, his understanding of his office was simply that of someone that the Bishop sends to represent him at events the Bishop cannot attend in person. This showed a gross lack of understanding. It dawned on me that many of you may be in this situation. You know the name of these offices but you may not have any clear idea of the canonical provisions for them. These thoughts were going through my mind when the news of the appointment of Rev. Fr. Basil Ezekeli as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Kingstown broke. I guess that Fr. Basil never imagined himself in that role. In the same way, who knows what you will become tomorrow. My second reason for sharing this with you is to encourage you to pay more attention. You may become the Vicar General, or any of the curial officials tomorrow. Even if your professor of Canon Law in the seminary made it boring, convince yourself that you need to pick up some ideas for your good and the good of the Church. So, let us explore the composition of the Diocesan Curia.

#### **(i) Composition of the Diocesan Curia**

The 1983 Code of Canon Law at c. 469 explains that “The diocesan curia is composed of those institutes and persons who assist the Bishop in governing the entire diocese, especially in directing pastoral action, in providing for the administration of the diocese, and in exercising judicial power”.

The term “diocesan curia” is used to refer to a collection of organizations, councils, committees and individual offices which contribute to the practical running of the diocese. According to the Second Vatican Council (*Christus Dominus*, no, 27), “the diocesan curia should be so organized that it may be a useful medium for the Bishop not only for diocesan administration but also for pastoral activity”. The canon identifies three areas where the curia ought to be of assistance to the Bishop:

- Directing pastoral action
- Administration, and
- The exercise of judicial power.

Generally speaking, the curia is made up of:

- (i) The Vicar (s) general and the Episcopal Vicars with their ancillary staff (see canons 475 – 481);
- (ii) The Chancellor, possibly a vice-Chancellor, other notaries and their support staff, as well as the diocesan archives (see canons 482 – 491);
- (iii) The Finance Council and Financial Administrator (see canons 492 – 494);
- (iv) The Council of Priests (Presbyteral Council) and the College of Consultors (cc. 495 – 502);
- (v) The Judicial Vicar, other judges, and the personnel of the tribunal (see canons 1420 – 1423, 1428 – 1437).
- (vi) In addition to the above, the Bishop may establish other offices, councils and commissions as he thinks fit.

## **(ii) Appointment to Offices in the Curia**

The appointment of those who fulfil an office in the diocesan curia belongs to the diocesan Bishop (c. 470). Within his own diocese, the diocesan Bishop is free to make appointments to ecclesiastical office by free conferral (c. 157). This prerogative includes the appointment of all who hold offices in the diocesan curia. Although free to appoint whomever he chooses, the Bishop must do so in conformity with the general norms of canon law (see cc. 146 – 156), the civil laws governing employment in the case of the laity, and specific provisions of law for certain offices, for example, the need to consult the College of Consultors and the Finance Council before appointing a Financial Administrator (c. 491, §1).

## **(iii) Moderator of the Curia**

To ensure that the diocesan Bishop fulfills his duties, the 1983 Code of Canon Law at canon 473 stipulates as follows:

“473, §1 The diocesan Bishop must ensure that everything concerning the administration of the whole diocese is properly coordinated and is directed in the way that will best achieve the good of that portion of the people of God entrusted to his care”.

§2 The diocesan Bishop has the responsibility of coordinating the pastoral action of the Vicars general and Episcopal Vicars. **Where it is useful, he may appoint a Moderator of the curia, who must be a priest. Under the Bishop’s authority, the Moderator is to coordinate activities concerning administrative matters and to ensure that the others who belong to the curia properly fulfil the offices entrusted to them.**

§3 unless in the Bishop’s judgment local conditions suggest otherwise, the Vicar General is to be appointed Moderator of the curia or, if there are several Vicars general, one of them.

§4 Where the Bishop judges it useful for the better promotion of pastoral action, he can establish an episcopal council, comprising the Vicars general and episcopal Vicars”.

The general principle of law is that responsibility for the government of the diocese rests ultimately with the Bishop. Through his coordination and direction of pastoral activity and ordinary administration, the Bishop serves the people of God entrusted to him. Canon 473 provides norms to assist the Bishop in attaining this goal; some are obligatory, other facultative.

Thus, the Bishop is obliged to coordinate the pastoral activity of the Vicar(s) general and the episcopal Vicars. He has to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication in their activities and that the whole diocese is well served by them. As Vicars of the Bishop, they are accountable to him alone. **The Bishop may decide that it is useful to appoint a Moderator of the Curia, who must be a priest. His function is to direct the smooth and efficient administration of the curia and to ensure that all the officials carry out their designated duties.** As a general rule – but not ‘if in the Bishop’s judgment local conditions suggest otherwise’ – this Moderator ought to be Vicar general of the diocese. The institution of a Moderator of the curia is a new one, introduced by the current Code. The ever-growing burden of day-to-day administration in some dioceses is such that it can make it extremely difficult for the Bishop to attend adequately to other and even more vital tasks of his episcopal office, such as detailed in cc. 375, 383-387, 396-397, etc. It is in circumstances of this kind that the assistance of a Moderator – who must of course himself reflect the mind of the Bishop – can be invaluable.

#### (iv) Vicars General

At c. 475 §1, the Church rules that “In each diocese the diocesan Bishop is to appoint a Vicar general to assist him in the governance of the whole diocese. The Vicar general has ordinary power, in accordance with the following canons” “As a general rule, one Vicar general is to be appointed, unless the size of the diocese, the number of inhabitants, or other pastoral reasons suggest otherwise” (c. 475 §2).

The appointment of a Vicar general is obligatory no matter how small the Diocese. **His power is exercised throughout the whole diocese.** According to the canon, there should be only one Vicar general in each particular Church, unless pastoral reasons suggest otherwise. However, when there are auxiliary Bishops, they must all be appointed Vicars general, or at least episcopal Vicars (c. 406), out of respect for their episcopal office.

**The Vicar general is listed among those referred to as Ordinaries (c. 134 §1). According to c. 131 §1 ‘ordinary power of governance is that which by virtue of the law itself is attached to a given office’. This power may be proper or vicarious (c. 131 §2). The power of a diocesan Bishop is ordinary and proper (c. 381 §1); that of a Vicar general is ordinary but *vicarious*, that is, his power belongs to the office itself but is exercised in the name of the diocesan Bishop. His authority, within the limits set by law, is the same as that of the Bishop (c. 479 §3) and cannot be exercised contrary to the will of mind of the Bishop (c. 480).** On occasion, a Vicar general may enjoy additional authority by virtue of a special mandate to deal with matters reserved by law to the ‘diocesan Bishop’ rather than the ‘local Ordinary’; in such circumstances, the Vicar general’s power is *delegated* not ordinary (cc. 137 – 142).

**According to c. 479 §1, “In virtue of his office, the Vicar general has the same executive power throughout the whole diocese as that which belongs by law to the diocesan Bishop: that is, he can perform all administrative acts, with the exception however of those which the Bishop has reserved to himself, or which by law require a special mandate of the Bishop”.**

**The power of governance exercised by the Vicar general is essentially one with that of the Bishop: He has the same power given by the law, and the same habitual faculties which the Holy See has granted to the diocesan Bishop (c. 479 §§1 – 3).** There are however some limitations. Where the law speaks of the ‘diocesan Bishop’ rather than the ‘local Ordinary’, a Vicar can act only if he has a special mandate from the Bishop, either for a specific case or in a more general way. It is possible for him to give a general mandate for all those actions where the law requires one, subject to any *ad hoc* reservation he may choose to make (§1). Equally the Bishop may withdraw some particular area or

case for his own consideration, but such a reservation must be made in an explicit manner, and is not presumed.

#### **(v) Episcopal Vicars**

The institution of the office of episcopal Vicar is new and the legislation in the Code derives from the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar norms (CD 23. ES I 14 [1-2]). **C. 476 §1 rules that: “As often as the good governance of the diocese requires it, the diocesan Bishop can also appoint one or more episcopal Vicars. These have the same ordinary power as the universal law gives to a Vicar general, in accordance with the following canons. *The competence of an episcopal Vicar, however, is limited to a determined part of the diocese, or to a specific type of activity, or to the faithful of a particular rite, or to certain groups of people*”.**

The diocesan Bishop has a completely free hand in making the appointment of a Vicar general or an episcopal Vicar when the candidate is simply a priest. He may also freely remove him. The requirement of grave reasons and proper procedure in the norms laid down in c. 193 §§1 and 2 do not seem to apply, although there is the implication that at least a just cause is needed and that the decree of removal must be notified in writing (c. 193 §§3 and 4). The Bishop does not have the same freedom with regard to his auxiliary Bishops, by virtue of the law, he must appoint them at least episcopal Vicars, if not Vicars general (c. 406)., and for the same reason cannot freely remove them from office.

**Generally, it is presumed that any office is conferred for an indefinite period of time, unless otherwise stated:** a parish priest for example, can be appointed for a specified period of time only if this has been sanctioned – and to the extent that it has been thus sanctioned – by the Conference of Bishops (c. 522). “The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria directs and decrees that the appointment of parish priests shall be ‘*ad tempus*’ or for a specified period of time” (cf. The Particular Complementary Norms to the Revised Code by The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, 1985, p. 22)

In the case of an auxiliary Bishop, the appointment, whether as Vicar general or episcopal Vicar, must be indefinite. **In the case of a priest, his appointment as episcopal Vicar must be for a specified period of time and not indefinitely. However, that of Vicar general may be indefinite or for a specified period; unless the latter is expressly included in the letter of appointment it is presumed that the appointment is for an indefinite period (c. 477 §§1 – 2).**

**The episcopal Vicar has identical power and status to the Vicar general. What is limited is his remit (c. 479 §2). The exercise of his authority is limited to the area indicated in his letter of appointment.** For this reason, any extension of his remit, even in a temporary way (for instance, during the

absence of the Vicar general), ought to be recorded in writing to avoid disputes over the validity of his actions.

#### **(vi) The Chancellor, other Notaries and the Archives**

The 1983 Code of Canon Law stipulates at c. 482 that: “In each curia a chancellor is to be appointed, whose principal office, unless particular law states otherwise, is to ensure that the acts of the curia are drawn up and dispatched, and that they are kept safe in the archive of the curia (§1). If it is considered necessary, the chancellor may be given an assistant, who is to be called vice-chancellor (§2). The chancellor and vice-chancellor are automatically notaries and secretaries of the curia (§2)”.

The importance of the office of the Chancellor is indicated by the fact that it is mandatory, and by the provision that he may, if necessary, be given an assistant. The Chancellor, may but need not be a cleric: in principle a lay man or woman may be, and nowadays not infrequently is appointed. If, however, the office is amalgamated with that of the Moderator of the Curia or entrusted with delegated power of governance by the Bishop, then only a priest may be appointed. Details of the functions of the Chancellor and other notaries as well as qualifications for the office are spelt out in c. 483.

It is essential that important actions and decisions are recorded on adequately authenticated documents. Before acting on the basis of any document, the executor is required to check its authenticity and integrity (c. 40). For any document to be ‘authentic’ in this sense the original signature or the marking of a copy must be witnessed and signed by a duly authorized notary. The role of the notary is then to give public testimony, by his or her signature, to the fact that the document has been signed by the person alleged, and that copies are accurate, whether made in manuscript form or photostatically. In the case of an official copy, the formula ‘*cum originali concordat*’ is normally used. Without such a signature the document may be correct but it is not authentic. In some cases, the signature of a notary is required for validity, for example, the judicial depositions of witnesses (c. 1569); in others it is required for lawfulness only.

Because of the importance attached to official documents, there must be no suspicion that the Chancellor or the notaries are doubtful in moral character, or capable of falsifying documents. Moreover, such documents will frequently be confidential in nature, requiring a total discretion of the part of every notary: hence the emphasis placed on the unblemished character required of the Chancellor and other notaries. As a further safeguard, cases involving the reputation of a priest require that the notary be himself a priest (c. 483 §2) – an important prescription especially when dealing with a penal process involving a priest.



The Chancellor and the other notaries can be freely removed by the diocesan Bishop. They can be removed by a diocesan Administrator only with the consent of the college of consultors (c. 485).

One major role of the Chancellor is taking custody of the archive (c. 486 – 487). Only the Bishop and the Chancellor are to have the key to the archive – either each having access to the one key or each possessing an identical key. Access to the archive may be granted by the Bishop alone without the consent of the Chancellor, or by the mutual agreement of both the Chancellor and the Moderator of the curia. The Chancellor alone cannot grant access.

#### **(vii) Other Offices and Organs of Administration of the Diocese**

Please refer to *Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia (CADEK) Policies and Procedures* (2021) for the following:

- (1) Presbyteral Council
- (2) College of Consultors
- (3) Diocesan Finance Council
- (4) Diocesan Pastoral Council
- (5) Deanery Council and Regional Council
- (6) Parish Pastoral Council
- (7) Parish Finance Council

#### **4. Documentation: An Essential Dimension of the Life of an Organization**

Every organization is a repository of information that pertain to it. That is why every organization pays attention to information gathering, storage and retrieval. The Church is known to be meticulous about record gathering and preservation. I wonder if that can now be said of the Church in our land. You can make it personal. Can that be said of your parish or place of apostolate? Our experiences on Pastoral Visits show that many of us are disappointments. In preparation for the Pastoral Visit, some priests try to create documents and ‘invent’ information to be presented and thus fulfil the obligation. It is clear to me that many of us do not know and, may be, do not want to know, the rationale behind the documents they are required to keep. You are supposed to be intentional regarding documentation for immediate and remote uses. You might have been in a situation where the absence of the document pertaining to a piece of land or that the document was not perfected, has given rise to irreconcilable narratives and conflicts. Please Monsignori and Fathers, you are supposed to have a record of important activities – celebration of the sacraments, meetings, transactions, events, - not only in the parish but in the community. You may be required to

verify any document purportedly issued by your parish. If you do not have a record or your predecessor did not leave any records, you are placed in an unenviable position of either affirming without evidence or denying because of an absence of evidence while being aware that this absence could be as a result of carelessness.

In the light of the above, I direct that every parish create an archive, where you keep your records. Be careful to minimize humidity and prevent pests like rats from getting to them. Second, I want you to know that it is the responsibility of the priests to keep the records. It is not that of the catechists or the seminarian. Even if they will be involved at all in the process, you are responsible and must collate the information as they are gathered. Do not wait till you are planning Pastoral Visit to do a crash programme of creating documents. Third, I have directed Rev. Fr. John Uzoigwe, Secretary on Statistics and Documentation to draw a schedule to visit all the Parishes in the diocese within the 2025/2026 Pastoral Year to supervise the Books of the parishes and present a report to me. Please cooperate with him to assist you to get your books in order. I request all the deans to ensure that priests in the deanery cooperate.

## **5. Chaplains of Groups**

Last Saturday, I met with members of the Legion of Mary. I begged them to extend their Legion Work to me and to you - their priests. We are all on the race to heaven and sometimes as bishops and priests, we may be lagging behind and in need of support. But no one comes because they presume that our ordination makes us spiritual super men. Yet, truth must be told, we may be struggling and the Christian community suffers because of that. Remember, parish communities often reflect the commitment of the priest. That was the hard truth one man from the parish with the largest number of attendees told us on Saturday. Let me give you a breakdown of the attendance:

- (i) Of the 8 parishes in Achina Deanery, 2 parishes were absent – Agbudu and Ogboji.
- (ii) Of the 7 parishes in Umuchu deanery, 3 parishes were absent – Umuomaku, Umuchu, St. Paul and Umuchu, Our Lady of Fatima.
- (iii) Of the 6 parishes in Akpo deanery, Akpo Christ the King was not represented.
- (iv) Of the 12 parishes in Akpu Deanery only 3 were represented – Akpugoeze, Nawfija and Ufuma, Holy Cross.
- (v) Of the 18 parishes in Umunze Deanery only 7 were represented: Umunze, St. Joseph, Holy Rosary, Ss Peter & Paul, St. Anthony, Eziagu, St. Michael, Ezira St. Mary, Ogbunka St. Monica.

- (vi) All the 11 parishes in Ekwulobia Deanery were represented except Amaokpala, St. Andrews.
- (vii) 3 out of the 7 parishes in Igboukwu Deanery were absent – Igboukwu, St. Flannan, Igboukwu St. Martin, Igboukwu St. John.
- (viii) Of the 6 parishes in Isuofia deanery only Umuona St. Maria Goretti was absent.
- (ix) Of the 10 parishes in Nanka Deanery, Nanka, Holy Trinity and Nanka St. Gregory were absent.
- (x) Of the 10 parishes in Uga, two were absent – Uga St. Michael and Uga St. Vincent.

I have taken time to give you the statistics so that you know the population distribution of those who attended. Akpu and Umuozu Deaneries were least represented. May I request the priests working there to look into this matter. I am sure that it is not limited to the Legion of Mary. Other pious societies would be affected. Yet we complain that young people are reverting to Igbo ancestral religion.

**More disheartening is that not even one deanery chaplain of the Marian Societies was in attendance.** I know that many priests do not understand the work of the chaplain. Canon 564 spells it out very well. The pastoral care of the group is entrusted to the chaplain in a stable manner. Does it not make sense that chaplains will be present at such meetings of those entrusted to their care with the Diocesan Bishop?

Despite the let down on the part of priests, the meeting provided much insight. Heart warming was the testimony of one man whose parish had the highest number of representatives – 69. The man shared that their parish priest often attended their meetings both at the Praesidium and Curiae levels. On behalf of all of us let me thank Rev. Fr. Cyril Offia, who is this parish priest. Please may we get more involved with our people and accompany them on their faith journey.

## **6. Pastoral Visit to CADEK Priests & Laity in Europe and Trip to the US**

Let me thank you for your prayers during the period of my absence with the Chancellor, Fr. Lawrence, first for a pastoral visit of CADEK Priests & Laity in Europe, (May 23–June 19), and then the trip to the United States of America (July 30–Aug 23). Erroneously, some of you refer to them as holiday trips. Far from that. They were work trips. The Pastoral visit took us to five countries – Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. The cash inflow from that Pastoral Visit for various projects in the Diocese stands at forty-six

thousand, five hundred and thirty-one euro (€46,531.=) and three thousand British pounds (£3,000.=). Some of the expenses (because CADEK Europe bore the weight of it) amount to two thousand, six hundred and fifty-one euro (€2,651.=).

The trip to the United States of America was facilitated by Rev. Fr. Tom Milota, a priest of the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois. We met in Rome as students. He made possible my first visit to the USA in 2001. After our studies, we lost contact. Last year while in Australia, I saw him on EWTN and his email was displayed. I quickly sent him an email and he replied. We reconnected. He promised to assist me in my ministry. He got the permission of his diocesan Bishop and arranged fundraising events in some parishes and in some private homes for the construction of the Community Children/Welfare Home at Ezinifite.

Last night, I got a text message that our fundraising efforts netted one hundred and fourteen thousand, two hundred and forty dollars, forty-seven cents (\$114,240.47) minus the wire transfer fee and the processing fee. Fr. Tom also promised to contact his classmate who is Bishop in another diocese for possible fundraising events in his diocese next year. He and some others have expressed interest to visit us on the occasion of the opening of the home when ready. To God be the glory!

Meanwhile, Mr. Ekene Nwankwo, brother to the Chancellor Fr. Lawrence, living in Chicago, not only supplied us with our Igbo local food for the entire period from his restaurant but also made a donation of two thousand dollars (\$2000.=) and immediately paid one thousand dollars (\$1000.=).

We took the weekday to make other visits. We visited our priests in the Archdiocese of Detroit – Rev. Frs. Cornelius Okeke and Michael Anagbogu (Aug. 4-7). A total of fourteen thousand, one hundred and seven dollars (\$14,107.=) was raised at a dinner organized in Fr. Cornelius' parish. The Archbishop of Detroit made a donation of one thousand dollars (\$1,000.) to our diocese and promised to welcome us to two of his parishes next year for fund raising. Two auxiliary Bishops in the diocese of Detroit were present at the Mass and dinner and gave us their good will. Please remember in your prayers, Dave & Cindi Firlik and also Dr. Meehan. Through the couple, Fr. Lawrence was linked to a foot doctor, Dr. Meehan, who sutured his gunshot wound.

We also honoured an invitation by Prof. Nnaemeka and Anulika Ezekwe at Houston, Texas (Aug. 7-9). This family is from Nimo and the connection for the visit was made through Rev. Frs. Eugene Okoli, Jovita Okoli and Christopher Okoli and Ichie Augustine Ukor from Umuoji. The amount raised at the dinner organized by the family is thirty-six thousand, three hundred and fifty-two dollars (\$36,352.=).

Beside the financial aspect, the contacts made are important. You will be informed as these mature. Once again, let me encourage you to be diligent in your duty post. Show that you are a steward worthy of trust and that you are interested in improving yourself to be a better instrument in God's hands. I repeat, especially to the young ones, make use of the opportunity of the CADEK language school. Proficiency in a language is now part of the condition for applying for visa either to study or work in a foreign non-English speaking country.

## **7. Reminder**

### **(i) Relationship with those in Community Leadership**

During our plenary meeting of May 3, 2021, I emphasized that as a diocese, we want to contribute to the social well being of our people and informed you that I had appointed a chaplain for an Association of Catholics in Community Leadership. The aim is not to meddle in the affairs of the communities. It is rather a recognition of the fact *na ochichi di olu* (leadership is burdensome). We need to keep praying for our leaders, especially at the local level.

We look forward to having all the communities in our diocese as peaceful and progressive as possible. **It is therefore expected that priests in any community should as much as possible establish a cordial relationship with the Traditional Ruler and President General of the communities where they live and exercise apostolate. Courtesy visits and other gestures are highly recommended.** Such relationships are to be extended to the chairmen of villages and other prominent persons in the community. **If there are 'king makers' in the community, one may need to go beyond the king to reach out to the 'king makers'.**

**(ii) Priests and Politics:** cf. Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests, no. 44 on Political and Social Engagement by priests.

“The priest is a servant of the Church, which by virtue of its universality and catholicity cannot have ties with any historical contingency, and hence he will therefore remain above and beyond any political party. He may not play an active role in political parties or the management of labour unions, unless, according to the judgement of the competent ecclesiastical authority, the rights of the Church and the promotion of the common good so require. In fact, even though these are good things in their own right, they are nonetheless alien to the clerical state since they can constitute a grave danger of division of ecclesial communion.”

**On the state of the Nation and Anambra State November 8, 2025  
Gubernatorial Election**

*My dear brothers, permit me to reiterate my address to you at the New Year Get-Together of the Presbyterium of Ekwulobia Diocese on January 11, 2021, at St. Joseph's Cathedral Ekwulobia in view of the gubernatorial election of November 6, 2021.*

I emphasized that we must be vigilant. We have to 'shine our eyes.' We have to be wise and also innocent.

We are preparing for another gubernatorial election already scheduled for November 8, 2025.

The politicians have relocated, full time, to their villages in the State. They have started working discreetly, selling themselves and the policies they will pursue. Since the electioneering campaigns commenced officially, they have been trying even harder to plant their names and faces in the hearts, minds, and imagination of the people. Some are even already emphasizing division along religious denominational lines.

As citizens, we must be concerned about what is happening in our communities and be committed to realizing the values of the Kingdom of God in the world. This demands principled engagement.

We have to tell ourselves the home truth that we cannot, as priests, arrogate to ourselves messianic status in our society. The ills of our society are found among us.

## **8. Announcements:**

### **(i) Creation of a New Region:**

With effect from this 2025/2026 Pastoral Year, Igboukwu Region has been carved out from Ekwulobia Region. Igboukwu Region is made up of Igboukwu and Isuofia deaneries. The Regional Headquarters is Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Igboukwu.

I have appointed Rev. Fr. Charles Umeoji as the Episcopal Vicar for the new Region. I invite him to receive the Decree of Erection of the Region. After, he will take the oath of office.

### **(ii) Appointment into the College of Consultors**

In line with can 502 § 1, I have added three new members to the College of Consultors. They are: Rev. Frs. John Umeojiakor, Justin Nwafor and Theodore Ekwem. One of them is present and he will take the oath of confidentiality in line with Can. 471.

Let me now invite the Episcopal Vicar for Igboukwu Region to step forward for his oath of office. After that, the one person present of those newly appointed into the College of Consultors will take an oath of confidentiality.

**(iii) The following four new parishes have been created:**

- (i) St. Paul's Parish Isuofia - Created out of Holy Trinity Parish Isuofia.
- (ii) Sacred Heart Parish Nanka - Created out of Holy Trinity Parish Nanka.
- (iii) St. Mary's Parish Nanka - created out of St. Anthony's Parish Nanka.
- (iv) St. Martin's Parish Umunze - Created out of St. Anthony's Parish Umunze

May I invite the Deans of Isuofia, Nanka and Umunze deaneries to step forward and collect the Decree of Erection of the parishes on behalf of the parish priest who will be announced soon. For the new parishes, this document should be the first in your archive. Remember also to register the parish as place of marriage. We spoke about this registration last year. Let me ascertain the level of compliance. Let the parish priests of the parishes created last year inform us whether they have registered their parishes :

- (a) Achina, Holy Trinity.
- (b) Ekwulobia, St. Peter.
- (c) Ekwulobia, St. Dominic
- (d) Ezinifite, St. Peter
- (e) Ezinifite, Holy Trinity
- (f) Ezira, St. Peter
- (g) Ezira, St. Joseph
- (h) Owerre Ezukala, St. Charles

**(iv) In Uga deanery where the office of the Dean is vacant,** I mandate the oldest Parish Priest by year of priestly ordination in the Deanery to convoke and preside over a meeting of all the priests in the deanery to propose three names to me for appointment of the dean. The proposed names should reach me through the Secretary to the Bishop on or before Tuesday October 17, 2025.

**(v) Other announcements.**

May I invite the Secretary for other announcements

**9. Personnel Placement for the 2025/2026 Pastoral Year**

As we come to the climax of our meeting, let me thank all of you for your labour of love in the pastoral year that is ending. We pray that God may give us all the grace to make his law our delight and to work diligently in his vineyard to His greater glory and our own sanctification.

May God bless you.