

MINUTES OF THE 21ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF NARAC HELD IN SOSSENHEIM, FRANKFURT AM MAIN ON 28TH SEPTEMBER 2012

Opening Prayer: The meeting started with an opening prayer said by Fr. Pius Benson at 11.45 am.

Opening Remarks: The President of NARAC, Fr. Theophilus Ejeh welcomed all present and thanked the D.D.L Sisters for accepting to host us.

Sr. Rosemary Ude, on behalf of the Regional Superior of D.D.L, welcomed the NARAC members to the meeting, telling all present to feel at home.

The president did remind us that we normally gather on every last Friday of the month of September to discuss different issues and have a paper presented to us. He expressed upfront the gratitude of the Organization to the day's presenter, Fr. Victor Anoka and to the moderator, Sr. Tina Ohadugha DMMM.

Attendance: Fr. Theophilus Ejeh, Sr. Rosecarmel Umah DMMM, Sr. Tina Ohadugha DMMM, Fr. Pius Benson, Sr. Mary Chukwuebuka Ozoka DMMM, Fr. Valentine Dimude SMMM, Sr. Miriam Ukawilu H.H.C.J, Sr. Emmanuela Akong H.H.C.J, Sr. Mary Prisca Ezeji D.D.L, Fr. Jude Okocha, Fr. Victor Anoka, Sr. Mary Rufina Mazeli D.D.L, Sr. Agatha Amadi D.D.L, Sr. Josephine Anagor D.D.L, Sr. Rosemary Ude D.D.L, Sr. Susan Odinikaeze, Fr. Uchenna Abah and Fr. Matthew Ezea were in attendance.

Paper Presentation:

Topic: The Call of Moses (Ex. 3:7-8) and the Nigerian Situation: Our Response as Clergy and Religious

The presenter started with the Nigerian predicament. There, he recalled some of the rare blessings with which Nigeria is blessed. Nigeria, according to him is a land flowing with milk and honey yet its people possess so little. Both natural and human resources of Nigeria are stupendous that Nigeria has the potential to become Africa's largest economy and a major player in the global economy. He went further to examine critically the 52 years of independence and how Nigerians have fared as a nation. Here, he bemoaned the sufferings of the nation, enumerating some of the ills bedevilling it: kidnapping, poor basic facilities, poverty, population explosion – an issue that triggered off a heated debate among members present at the meeting, violence in its varied forms, unemployment, confused leadership, insecurity and corruption even among clergy.

Having extensively dealt with the predicament of the nation, Nigeria, he went on in search of a therapy for the so sickened nation. In this connection, he talked of God's choice of us (Priests and Religious). Using Exodus 3: 7-8 as a departure point, he said that we are the Moses of our time, called to liberate our people from the shackles of bondage and to give them new hope and an opportunity for a new life. He argued that as priests and religious that we have access to the people; we can talk to them and they listen; we have their attention and it is often surprising how much people want to be led and how willing they are to be directed

on important decisions in life. From there, he moved on to what he termed ‘our response to the Nigerian predicament’. He saw the response from two perspectives, namely response to ourselves and that to the environment. That to ourselves is to be done by our being ourselves. Every person is expected to be himself or herself. “Let Paul be Paul and Philomena be Philomena”, he said. The eagerness to be other than who and what we are, has given us fatal wound. Again, the need to train ourselves for the challenges at home was underscored. Of course, we can achieve this only through education since it is the gateway to opportunity. For him, it is not enough to come to this country and do mission work. Our mission work, therefore, should be combined with equipping ourselves educationally. Diversification was emphasized, that is to say, priests for instance must not all study philosophy or theology; there are other disciplines which could be studied. Maximization of opportunities was seen as the third response to ourselves. Here he reiterated the need to have young stars who, are at home languishing, trained abroad or even locally and put into effective use at home. The fourth response, he mentioned, was the development of strong prayer life and absolute trust in Divine Providence. It is unfortunate, he said, that some priests and religious are so faithless that they even go to the extent of consulting *dibias* (traditional medicine men) or inviting prayer warriors of non-catholic backgrounds to pray and conduct healing sessions for their families and or parishioners. Other responses to ourselves include: positive attitude to one another, refraining from gossips or defaming others and unity among priests and religious.

In furtherance and in conclusion anyway, the presenter talked about our response to our environment. In this section, he began by posing a question as to whether the policy of the Church not mixing in politics or influencing the political environment of our nation not already outdated. On another note, he underlined the need to provide quality education, encouraging priests and religious to take part in empowering people by establishing scholarships in our local communities. Very importantly, he urged us not to attach conditions to the help we render people. This is against the backdrop that some priests and religious have destroyed the dreams and values of some young boys and girls with whom they sleep as a *Gegenleistung* to the help given to them. We can help, he said, in the area of providing health care by aiding in equipping our diocesan hospitals. Again, we have to lead by example. According to him, people nowadays read meaning into every movement of a priest and a religious no thanks to the fact that our morals have gone so low. Other issues, he treated in this section as our response to the environment in which we live include: the need to be writing articles in magazines, journals etc., establishing development centres in the dioceses and protecting our cultural values.

Sr. Susan Odinikaeze remarked, based on the paper presented, that the presenter dwelt much on negative factors, asking if the positive ones do not outnumber the negative ones.

Fr. Theophilus Ejeh pointed out that the issue of cultural revival championed by Priests and Religious is indeed enormous. The question of involvement in politics is all about influencing things from where one is staying and not necessarily being like Fr. Adasu. But he did add, that such involvement demands courage. Frs. Jude Okocha, Valantine Dimude also aired their views on the matter under discussion. Once again, the President thanked the presenter, the moderator and the contributors for their active participation.

Kola nuts: The D.D.L Sisters presented kola nuts to the assembly after the paper had been presented. Of course they did receive from us our appreciation and gratitude through the President.

Lunch: we were treated to delicious and sumptuous dishes. Variety of them indeed!

Minutes of the previous meeting: Fr. Matthew Ezea was asked to talk with the Secretary pertaining to the minutes. For it seemed, he merged two minutes which resulted to a serious muddle. Fr. Uchenna Abah read out the report of the last Easter party held in Essen.

Financial Report: While balance brought forward from 9th April 2012 to 27th September 2012 amounted to €2,942.61, dues were €760 and all totalling €3,702.61.

Expenditure: Send-off gift to Fr. Donatus Onuigbo took €50; financial assistance to D.D.L Sisters who hosted the meeting was €200, bringing the total expenditure to €250. The foregoing shows therefore €3,452.61 as cash at hand.

Matters arising

Dates of meetings: It was already agreed that the dates of General Meeting and Easter party should not be discussed any longer. However, Fr. Valentine Dimude went ahead to propose that the Easter party be moved from Easter Monday to Tuesday.

It was observed that since the minutes were yet to be adopted, we could cash in on that and talk about the change of dates of meetings. Sr. Miriam Ukawilu was of the opinion that the date of the meeting be shifted while Sr. Agatha Amadi sees it as uncalled for since one can plan ahead of time. After every deliberation on the issue, it was agreed that the dates be left un-tampered; if after next election and the new executive deems it necessary to revisit the issue, it has all the right to do so.

Website: we were reminded of our beautiful website with articles and pictures. A call to maintain it was made and having the website serviced means nothing but contributing articles. Again, those whose addresses or other means of contacts changed, were and are being called to forward the changes. All the members are encouraged to visit frequently the website, to give their suggestions. Financially, the website is maintained with just a token of €20 thanks to the friendly rapport between Mr. President and the Webmaster or designer.

Frs. John Nwaogaidu and Donatus Onuigbo were charged with the responsibility of collaborating with the webmaster in the upkeep of the website. Unfortunately however, Fr. Donatus has gone home and so a person or persons are needed to partner with Fr. John in this responsibility. Srs. Rosecarmel Umah and Tina Ohadugha accepted to work for NARAC in this capacity.

Propagating NARAC: Opinions on the best ways of propagating NARAC were aired. Getting T-shirts bearing the Name of NARAC was ab initio proposed and heavily discussed. After a protracted deliberation, the house settled for ballpoints on which are printed the name and website of NARAC.

Zones: The non-functional *zonal* system was greatly bemoaned.

New Members: Fr. Valentine Dimude SMMM from Awka diocese, presently in the diocese of Augsburg, arrived in 2007. Our traditional dictionary-token was given to him as a welcome package.

NARAC as Charity Organization?: The question was thrown to the members as to whether NARAC can aid in ameliorating the sufferings of those in need especially in times of catastrophes. It was underscored that if we want to help people in need, then we must be ready to make some sacrifices. The idea was saluted by the members present. The issue was then shifted to Easter party of 2013 for discussion. On a similar note but concretely now, Fr. Theophilus Ejeh reported on the flood in Kogi State of Nigeria that displaced so many people including priests. He solicited for financial support to help the victims. In solidarity, those present were moved to raise €102 for the flood-victims. The president said, that such a nice gesture has to be continued in such a way that if we gather and someone comes up with a similar case, the person would find the support and concrete assistance from the NARAC members.

Vote of thanks: Fr. Uchenna Abah thanked once again Fr. Victor Anoka, the thought-provoking paper presenter for the sacrifices he made to write and present the paper and Sr. Tina Ohadugha DMMM for the professional touch she gave to the moderation of the paper.

Fr. Matthew Ezea, on his own count, expressed the debt of gratitude the organization owes the D.D.L Sisters for their hosting and hospitality.

Closing Prayer: Sr. Prisca Ezeji said the prayer at the end of the meeting at about 4.10 pm and all received the blessing from the hands of Fr. Valentine Dimude DMMM.