

## IN ROME

WHEN REV. FRANCIS ARINZE, NEWLY ORDAINED PRIEST FROM ONITSHA, SANG HIS FIRST HIGH MASS IN THE MOTHERHOUSE CHAPEL, OUR TWO STUDENTS, LUCY USEN AND ROSELYNE EDEM, WERE PRESENT. HERE THEY ARE SHOWN WITH REVEREND MOTHER GENERAL AND TWO SEMINARIANS FROM PROPAGANDA COLLEGE, SYLVANUS ETUK FROM EASTERN NIGERIA (LEFT) AND FESTUS NGIGI FROM KENYA (RIGHT).



## Two Holy Child Students from Africa tell their stories.

“The work of a Mission is told most penetratingly in terms of personalities. The fruit of that work is often best shown in the lives of children trained there”

Monsignor MCCARTHY:

I come from the little village of Ikot Esia in Eastern Nigeria where my family was Christianized in the 19th Century by Scottish Protestants. It was not until my cousin was admitted to the Holy Child Training College in Ifuho that I heard about Nuns and their tremendous self-sacrifice. They asked nothing for themselves; they gave everything. It was their way. I had been dreaming most of my life of getting the higher education they provided. My father agreed to send me to secondary school, but before he could receive an answer to the application, the entries were closed. I did not give up. After a few months I went to stay with my uncle and his family at Ikot Ekpe-ne near Ifuho, and I met the Sisters. My third visit to them was on a Sunday. When I was about to leave the bell rang for Benediction and they invited me to remain. I was greatly moved by the solemnity of the short but impressive ceremony.

And so it was in May, 1945, that I first saw the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance.

When I went home to my uncle's I talked so much about what I had seen that I gave him no peace until he promised to try to secure a place for me in the school. In 1946 when the new Modern Course began there, I was among the first twenty-five girls to enter. Reverend Mother Mary Damien and Mother Mary Edwin were among my teachers. Of a truth, the knowledge they imparted helped us in and out.

Now came the time of my first Retreat in life which was given by Monsignor Dominic Conway who was then the principal of the Holy Family College in Abak. His instruction and those of our Nuns were so striking that I made up my mind to be good no matter how much I suffered for it. When I returned home to our village my parents were impressed at my new ways.



A TYPICAL BUSH SCHOOL. THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY CHILD SUPERVISE MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED SUCH SCHOOLS.

After completing the Modern Course, I was admitted to Mayfield in Afikpo for my teacher training. In July, 1949, I wrote my father that I wanted to be a Catholic. He responded in a very nice way - that if I wanted to be a Catholic in the true sense of the word to go ahead, but if I wanted to become one because others were doing so, that was no faith. That was his last letter to me. Three weeks later my father died. This was a great trouble to my conscience and a hindrance to my conversion - because as soon as I received his consent, he died. But when Mother Mary Helen took me home I learned that while my father was in the hospital he sent for a priest and was baptized. After receiving the Last Sacraments he went happily to rest with God. When I heard this my spirit awoke within me and I had the great consolation that he was pointing the right way for me to follow. I stepped forward and was baptized by Father Mc-Namara in Afikpo with two other friends on the 20th November, 1949.

The next morning we received our First Holy Communion in the

Convent Chapel. At about mid-day the Superior General of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Reverend Mother Mary Geneviève, arrived at Mayfield. Being so pleased to see us received into the Church, she said to us, "My children, I really thank God for the graces you have received. Now it is left for you to carry on well and become good teachers in order to impart what you have received to others. God bless you!"

I wrote the words in my diary because I knew they would help me to check up on myself for betterment.

In 1950, having completed my course, I was sent with three other teachers to a brand new school at Ekpuk. The natives of this bush village put the last touches to the building just as we arrived! Since it was a mud house we could not use it until it got dried up, so we had to hold classes in the church and we lived in the tiny hut the priest had previously used when he came on tour.

The school started in earnest but that first day we had only forty children.

I asked the headmistress to permit two of us to go into the village and speak to the natives. She agreed, and we spent about three hours going from house to house every day after school. In the course of a week we were able to get seventy-eight children, but my class was still too small for one teacher (only ten "regulars") and I was transferred elsewhere.

Then in 1951 there comes another "three teacher" bush school to open - Ibiono No. 1 - with no house ready for us but a half-roofed hut in the midst of palm trees. The headmistress, Lucy Peter, now Sister Mary Peter, H.H.C.J., did her best to interest the people in the upkeep of the school, and Roselyne Edem - who had been at school with me at Afikpo - and I hunted for children. After a week we had 170 children which was more than enough for three teachers, so two more were sent to help us. The five of us carried out the spade work as pioneers. Two of the big problems were scarcity of water, and the difficulty in changing coins to manillas (iron pieces used for money) before we could buy what we needed. After a short time, however, manillas were abolished and all went well with the money problem.

Lucy and Roselyne taught me the prayers of the Legion of Mary and the three of us helped the women in the village, who belonged to the Legion, by bringing back lapsed Catholics and getting children baptized.

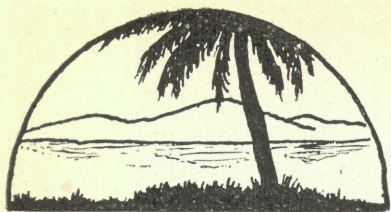
For eight years I served as a teacher under our kind and enthusiastic manager, Mother M. Stephane. One day I heard Reverend Mother Vicar wanted to see me in Ifuho. When I arrived, Reverend Mother told me about the

new School of Social Service that was being organized in Rome under the direction of the International Conference of Catholic Charities. Would I like to try for a scholarship? I said I would ask my uncle for his consent. He said "Yes," so I joined four others and we went to meet His Lordship, Bishop James Moynagh, in Calabar. After a short interview, the Bishop asked us to write the answers to some questions, then he gave us the fare and we went back to our different stations. Great was our joy when the lot fell on Roselyne and me. We flew to this ancient city, the Heart of our Religion, last June, and again we were "pioneers" in a project for we were the first of the international group to arrive. I never for one moment in my life dreamed that I would be here. How I thank God, and the Bishop and Reverend Mother Vicar and all the others who helped me to take this step further than I ever expected! In two years, at the end of the course, I hope to go back and share the graces I have been given with my people.

LUCY USEN

A LEGION OF MARY MEETING IN A BUSH VILLAGE.





## 'Edima Jesus Ami

mmama Fi'

Soon after I was born in Calabar, my family went to live in a nearby village, Ibiono. They were staunch Protestants due to the fact that Protestant missionaries brought their Religion to my home town in 1846. and it was the first Christian Religion known to our tribe.

The education of girls was badly needed and Providence decided that the Holy Child Nuns should land in Calabar in 1930 to begin their pioneer work, which was full of excessive sacrifice, my people told me. My father heard of the tremendous work of the Nuns and the good education given the girls, so he did not hesitate to take my sister to the Convent school. She was warmly received by the Nuns and admitted as a boarder. Being so young that she could hardly do anything for herself, she was entrusted to the kind care of Sister Mary Ignatia who was then a Handmaid Postulant. My sister received the best kind of training not only materially but spiritually, and was baptized a Catholic.

When she came home during vacation, she used to tell me many good things about the Holy Child Nuns. Once she related how another boarder in the Convent school became very ill during the night, and the Head Cottage Mistress went up to the Mothers' House to tell the Sisters. They immediately brought the sick child to their own community room to take care of her. Then the Mothers and children knelt down together to recite the Holy Rosary for the speedy recovery of the poor child. As she was still desperately ill,

Reverend Mother Teresa Xavier asked the other children to go to bed, but the Nuns watched and prayed by her bedside all night. When the children came to the Mothers' House in the morning they saw that their little friend had survived thanks to the best of treatment.

I was greatly moved by the story and could not help asking why the Nuns had offered up their night's sleep, because in my youth I preferred sleeping to all other things in life; neither did I have any idea of responsibility. As far as I can recall, that was my first knowledge of the Nuns. I kept repeating the word, "Mother" and decided to go with my sister to visit the Convent. But that was not possible at the time. I held my peace until 1940 when my cousin, who was then teaching in the Convent school, Calabar, took me there to be admitted. I pitied our teacher for we were as noisy as weaver birds that first day. The most impressive part was when Mother Mary Assumpta, then in charge of the Infant department, assembled

FATHER ARINZE SHOWS HIS ORDINATION GIFTS TO HIS FELLOW-AFRICANS AND TO TWO SISTERS FROM INDIA, SR. ESPERIE AND SR. MISERICORS.



THE  
CALABAR  
MISSION  
IN THE  
EARLY '40's  
WHEN  
ROSELYNE  
WAS A  
PUPIL THERE.



all the beginners and told us a story about Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. She stressed the fact that Jesus is a Great Friend of little children and thus He loves them dearly. In return, He wants them to show their love by visiting Him in the Blessed Sacrament, and also by obeying their parents. At the end of the story we were taken to the small Chapel to pay Him a visit. We went down on our little knees and whispered to Our Friend this prayer: "O sweet Jesus, I love You". In our Efik language it is: "Edima Jesus Ami mmama Fi".

In the early 'forties when I started school, things were only beginning to take shape, but now the Calabar Holy Child school has expanded into other schools and grown tremendously. To finish my Standard Six course, I went to the Convent School at Anua-Uyo where Sister Mary Aloysia, H.H.C.J. was the principal, and also our mother in the true sense of the word. In fact, her motherly advice helped me all through my 'teen age and still guides me. On 1st December, 1947 I was baptized by Father Dolan,

after passing the Catechism examination, thank God. It was an extra blessing when I was told that I was to serve in Anua as a pupil-teacher and continue to be under the direction of Sr. Mary Aloysia, who would prepare me for entrance into the training college at Afikpo.

When the day came for me to leave for the college my heart was heavy at the thought of saying good-bye to my mother for seven months. But she promised to write often, and I finally left with some other students. We did not arrive at Mayfield in Afikpo until around 8 p.m. because our train had broken down, but the tiring journey was forgotten in the grand reception given us by the Nuns. Great was my joy at meeting Mother Mary Assumpta again, the one who had admitted me on my very first day of school. The next morning the principal outlined our goal, which was to become good apostolic teachers, imparting our knowledge of God to the little ones and to all we contacted, and helping them to lead good moral lives.



FOR HER OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICA, REV. M. MARY OSMUND, THE FIRST MOTHER VICAR OF OUR AFRICAN VICARIATE, BEING INVESTED BY H. M. QUEEN ELISABETH II WITH THE ORDER OF COMMANDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

Naturally, when a student completes her course she must take a teaching appointment and I was praying to go to a big primary school. Instead, I was sent to a brand new school where nothing was ready! But the villagers soon made good their promises to our dear manager, Mother Mary Stephane. I was highly impressed also at the ingenuity and Holy Child spirit of our headmistress, Miss Lucy Usen, and it happens that both of us are now together in Rome. But much was to take place before we came to Italy. On three occasions it has been my privilege to help open a new school

that was little more than a hut in a village, and to see it grow into a big, permanent building under Mother Mary Stephane's management.

In 1958 circumstances offered me a chance of teaching in a large school, St. Mary's, in Ekpene Ukim. One day I had an emergency call from Reverend Mother Vicar and I left immediately to see her in Ifuho. She asked me if I would like to accept the offer of a scholarship in Rome, and when I was able to talk again and say "Yes!" she told me I must see Bishop Moynagh in Calabar. My happiness was doubled for I thought I would have the chance of seeing my mother. The Bishop kindly explained the project to us and said the result of the interviews would be sent to us through Reverend Mother Vicar.

I started to rush home to see my mother but just at the mission gate my relatives met me and related that she was hopelessly ill. I did not believe them but pressed on home. My mother had not been well for some months but I could not believe she was this sick. She was beyond human help by the time I reached her. A year before she had joined my sister and myself in the Faith, and now we sent for a priest to give her the Last Sacraments. That was my one consolation in the saddest and bleakest moment of my life.

A few weeks later I learned that I was one of the successful candidates for the scholarship, and I knew my mother had been praying for me. I owe a great debt of gratitude, as she often told me, to God and to the Holy Child nuns. When I finish in Rome, I hope to return to Nigeria and help to keep their great work going.

ROSELYNE EDEM