

*In front of the Cathedral in Ifuho after Sunday Mass ... Bishop Ekandem greets Rev. M. M. Bernard and a group of Holy Child primary school children. (New uniforms will be woven in the technical school.)*

## What of the Ninety-Five Percent ?

by MARY T. KELLUM

“ And so we have an embroidery machine, the latest design, absolutely perfect — and absolutely free! — But of course we have no proper electric current as yet to run it or place to put it.” The Bishop beamed as if in his mind’s eye he could see the projected technical school where hundreds of Nigerian girls would be trained to be confident, self-supporting young women.

When the Right Reverend Dominic Ekandem, O. B. E. was appointed as the first Bishop of the new diocese of Ikot Ekpene, he was already known as a man

of wide vision, a resourceful leader. He faces problems squarely. And one of the problems is only too evident: roughly speaking, only five percent of the nation’s primary school girls are able to go on to secondary school, chiefly because of economic reasons. What is to become of the other ninety-five percent?

“ It’s up to us to give them a head start,” said the Bishop. “ We’ve got to offer them training and work. Sewing, weaving, typing, cookery — the technical schools must offer them all this and more. Come, and I will show

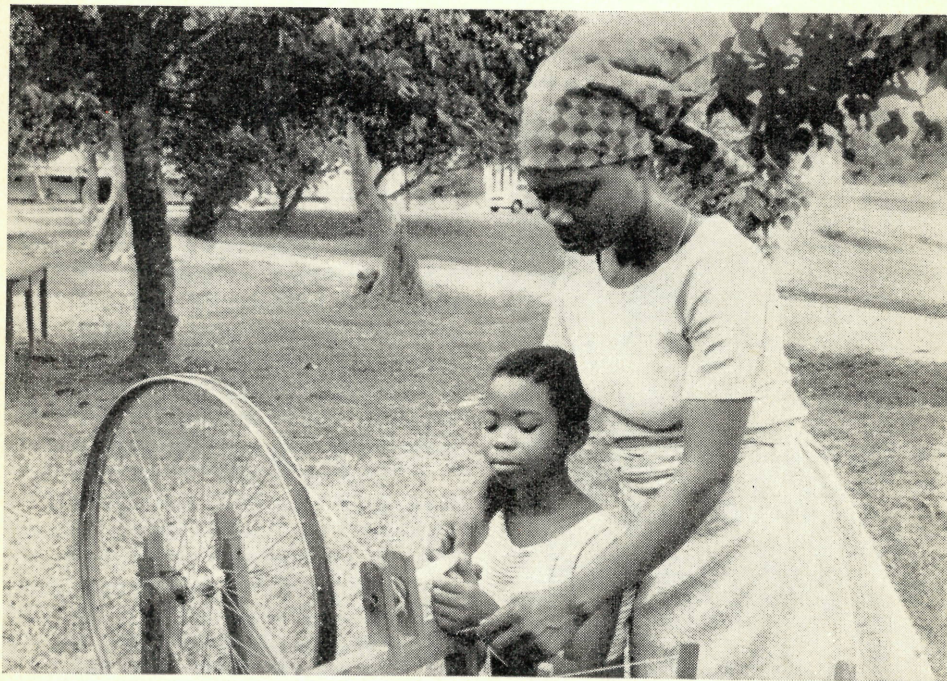
you our 'mustard seed' beginning of the school here in Ifuho."

Ifuho is a part of Ikot Ekpene; we were standing in front of the Cathedral which is situated on a hill directly opposite the Holy Child "mother house" in Africa. With Rev. Mother M. Bernard, who is assisting the Bishop in this new undertaking, we walked down the hill to a low building near the highway. This was the weaving shed. The sound of the looms in action was blended with soft singing. Several girls were learning the fine art of interlacing yarns under the direction of Martina.

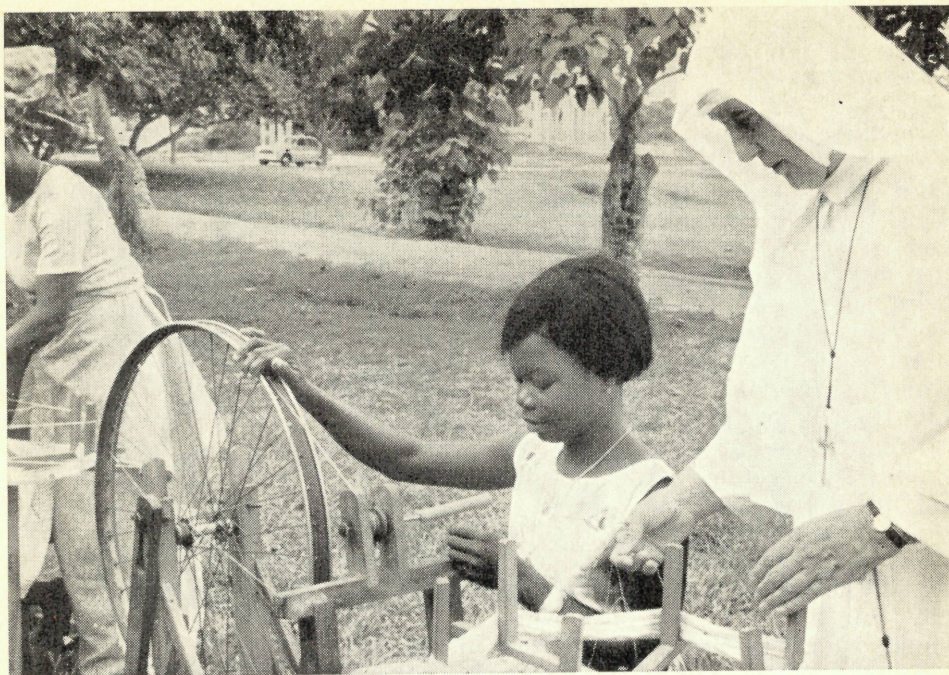
She is a smiling young person with an innate courtesy, this Martina, and quite a story in herself. She grew up in a bush compound where there was little opportunity to get much education.

But when she heard about the one true God, she attended classes regularly at the Catholic Mission. After her Baptism, she became a catechist, in the small village of *Midim Midim*. The parish priest saw her zeal, her gentle influence with the people, and sent her to be trained by the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus at St. Mary's Technical School in Ekpene Ukim. Martina learned to weave, sew, embroider — and to acquire an even deeper love of God. She was back helping the people of *Midim Midim* when Bishop Ekan-dem sent for her to become the foundation stone of his technical school in Ifuho.

Now, Martina is training a nucleus of young girls and already has given them a remarkable family spirit. They attend morning Mass together daily in the



Martina is training a nucleus of young girls.



This girl is making her warping thread while Rev. M. M. Bernard holds the yarn.

Cathedral, say their evening prayers in common, reciting "Compline" and singing the "Salve Regina." And they sing as they weave, usually religious songs set to old tribal tunes.

"We may have only a small beginning here," said Rev. Mother M. Bernard, "but the spirit is tremendous."

She has given the girls a small house in the Convent compound to live in and some day soon — "when we have enough work ready" — they plan to have a shop on the front porch. Meanwhile, the beautifully new embroidery machine waits to take its place in the new school. The machine is the gift of the "Union of Italian Catholic Women" and was presented to Bishop Ekandem while he was in Rome. This, and a dozen second-hand typewriters

which a St. Patrick's Father managed to get in Ireland, comprise their assets to date. But nothing daunts the Bishops.

When he was the Auxiliary Bishop in Anua, he arranged for the Sisters of Charity from England to come and open a technical school there. Today, *Adiaha-Obong* (which means "queen" and is Our Lady's title in Efik) is a flourishing big school. They have a five-year course in domestic science and commerce and teach secondary school subjects as well.

"Here in Ifuho I want only a technical centre," the Bishop explained. He hopes this main centre will be the mother of a number of sub-centres in other parts of his diocese. In keeping with the principle of self-help, after completing the course the girls will work independently or in small groups in



**Good  
embroidery  
work from  
Africa is  
in demand.**

their own villages, selling their material in the local market. Some will set up a dressmaking shop along the highway or in town; others will become secretaries.

To learn a trade . . . to learn the art of being self-supporting . . . it spells the difference between integrity as a person and degradation.

On a previous trip to Africa I recall being with Rev. Mother M. Bernard at Uyo, where she was Superior at the time, when an only too common incident occurred. A tired, obviously heartsick girl of about fourteen came trudging up the road and stood waiting to see Reverend Mother. The poor child had walked nearly fifteen miles to Uyo and had eaten nothing since the day before. Ann was one of the numerous destitute children who have sought out the "Mothers" for help. Her father had died, leaving her without support, and the pagan chief of her village wanted to take her as his fifth

wife. After a rest at Uyo and plenty of good food, Ann was taken by Reverend Mother to the Handmaids' technical school in Ekpene





**A dressmaking shop in the tropics usually has its own brand of air-conditioning.**

Ukim, the same place where Martina was to go at a later date. St. Mary's is small but it is well known for the fine work that it turns out.

"Whatever happened to Ann?" I asked Reverend Mother now. Her smile was answer enough. "She has her own shop, gives employment to several other women, and still manages to find time for Legion work!"

It is estimated that some three hundred or more girls can benefit yearly from the Ifuho technical

centre if the Bishop can carry through his plan. But much financial aid is needed for the undertaking. Every penny counts for brick-upon-brick to build the new school. Any contribution will be most gratefully received and may be sent directly to:

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