

INTRODUCTION

Every day new sects are born. We seem, according to St. Paul, to be *tossed about by any wave or wind of doctrine, and deceived by the cunning of people who drag them along into error* (Ephesians 4:14). Authentic faith becomes synonymous with fundamentalism.

How many winds of doctrine we have known in these last decades, how many ideological currents, how many fashions of thought? The small boat of thought of many Christians has often remained agitated by the waves, tossed about from one extreme to the other; Dictatorship of relativism has its grip on us. The Catholic Diocese of Aba is being strangulated by this because of its deep rootedness in a territory with a proliferation and/or rather very fast expansion of Pentecostal churches and *doctrine*, as well as in a land which constitutes an emblem of a great challenge posed by deep-seated paganism and traditional religiosity. These highlight a fundamental fragility in the processes of living our faith and becloud our identity. This is the central concern of the First Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Aba on *TRUE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY*.

This SYNOD ACT A is a collated distillation of the fruit of our work in Azumini, Ndoki to serve as reference points in our evangelization in this third millennium. I am exceedingly obliged to all the Synod officials, members, staff and the Editorial staff and in particular to Very Reverend Father Innocent I. Nwokenna, Reverend Father William O. Onwundi and Reverend Father Chigbu A. Chigbu for their invaluable contributions towards the crystallization of this ACT A. Every work of this kind is by its nature deficient. Nonetheless it is an attempt to mine the fruit of the Synod and help grapple with the problem of holding on to our true Christian Identity

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OUR RECOGNITION

As the People of God who constitute this local Church of the Diocese of Aba, we have welcomed and accepted the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that we have been called and gathered by God into this community of believers, in this time and this place. We acknowledge that we have been gathered together to grow in faith, prayer and love so that, having been strengthened and nourished by God's Word and teaching, the sacraments and the support of one another, we are sent from this community of believers to all strata of humanity in Abia South to proclaim the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. We are gathered- in order to be sent.

We recognize evangelization as the essential mission of the Church, the foundation that ties all ministry together. "Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize". We believe our call as the Church in Abia South is to continuously evangelize ourselves while reaching out to others.

We acknowledge that evangelization begins with the person, grows within the family system and the ecclesial community and flows into the civic share in the evangelizing mission of the Church according to their particular vocations. Clergy, religious and laity exercise their role by building up the community and forming and nurturing it in faith, prayer and love. The primary role of the Bishop and priests is " ... keeping this community gathered around Christ, faithful to its deepest vocation." Most of God's people exercise their evangelizing vocation by being the presence of God in the world and thus are the instruments of its transformation into the new creation.

We recognize that there are certain structures which are meant to facilitate our evangelizing activity. Primary recognition is given to the family ~nit, the domestic Church, where the Gospel is first transmitted and lived. We acknowledge the importance of this foundational unit and commit ourselves to supporting families and family life. We acknowledge that next to the family, the fundamental unit into which we are gathered to grow in faith, prayer-and love is the parish. We commit ourselves to meeting the challenge of building parishes into vibrant evangelizing communities. We recognize and support other groupings of the community of believers where people seek to grow in faith, prayer and love, ecclesial movements and organizations. We call on these groups to commit themselves to living and proclaiming the Gospel to the people of our time.

Recognizing that all baptized share in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner, and are called to exercise the mission of Christ in the world, the Church has throughout history taken formal steps to reflect on her mission in an ever-changing world. One such step has been to convoke an institution known as a

Synod. The word Synod is derived from two Greek words, meaning "with" and "road." Taken from the original Greek words, this implies a "walking together." As part of the Synod process, a bishop calls together representatives of the clergy, laity and religious to reflect on their mission as Church as this relates to their time and place.

The Church does this being mindful of her mission of Christ in every age. Not only does the Church rejoice in the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, she is also nourished by God's Word and Sacraments, as she lives out her experience of redemption and the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world. The Church continually reflects on her mission to proclaim the Good News that all things have been reconciled to the Father through the Son and sustained by the Spirit. Reading the signs of the times she has successfully preserved her Unity in the Body of Christ while proclaiming this salvation through Jesus in all cultures and in every generation.

Through the ages, Synods have been instruments of renewal in the Church, deepening the spirituality of the faithful and increasing their effectiveness in proclaiming the message of Christ. Vatican Council II recognized the common bond of the ancient synodal tradition for our time when it urged that synods flourish with new vigor. Thus, faith will be spread and discipline preserved more fittingly and effectively in the various churches, as the circumstances of the times require.

THE CONVOCATION OF THE FIRST DIOCESAN SYNOD IN SEARCH OF TRUE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Following the Second Vatican Council, the task of revising the Code of Canon Law was begun. One of the reasons for the revision was to reflect the spirit and the changes which occurred as a result of the Council. The Revised Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983 includes principles on the obligations and rights of all the faithful to be concerned with the mission of the Church and to share in the practical efforts of their own local churches. In addition, the Code provides for the use of the institution of an "ecclesiastical Synod" to assist the local church in the renewal of its efforts and fulfillment of its mission in the world.

The Synod participates in the concerns of the local church as a consultative body. This status of participation implies responsibility on the part of Synod members. Here, they have a vote which is "an exercise in community reflection and discussion about matters of ecclesial concern."

Since its founding on April 2, 1990, the Diocese of Aba has experienced many changes: The impact of Vatican II, publication of the Revised Code of Canon Law, the African Synod and the change in Abia South sociological make-up have had a marked influence on the faithful and other residents of this southern diocese on the East. of the nation. These realities were not lost in the mind of the local ordinary of

the diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. V. V. Ezeonyia C.S.Sp., as he noted that the young Church of Aba had never met in a Synod. Though, while under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Umuahia diocese, it experienced its first Synod in 1985 in Ahiaeke.

Mindful of the ecclesial situation of the days, as well as the historical and social realities of the community, the Bishop recognized an urgent need of the Christian faithful in the diocese of Aba to "walk together" with a renewed spirit to search for a true Christian identity. This move was based on his conviction that as a Church, the faithful are called to share the responsibility of the mission of Jesus in Abia South during the Great Jubilee Year of 2000. For these reasons, he saw a need for the faithful to gather in the ancient ecclesial tradition of a Synod to discern, embrace and plan and search for that to which the Spirit called them.

Early in January, 1999, in accord with the Canon Law requirement to consult with the Council of priests (Presbyteral Council), the bishop shared with the Council the decision to convoke the First Synod of the Diocese of Aba. Later in October 10, 1999 the decree of convocation was issued to the Pastoral Council. And in February 12, 2000 Father I.I. Nwokenna was appointed General Secretary and Promoter of the Synod and Mrs. Emily Emeagi was named Synod Secretary. A synod coordinating committee was formed and appointed, made up of the following:

- Rt. Rev. Msgr. (Dr) T. E. Ahunanya Vicar General
- Very Rev. Fr. Innocent Nwokenna Judicial Vicar
- Mrs. Emily Emeagi
- Very Rev. Msgr. (Dr) Innocent Alaribe
- Very Rev. Msgr. (Dr.) Okechukwu C. Obiego
- Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Ralph A. Nwosu
- Rev. Sr. Anne N gadu
- Rev. Sr. Elizabeth Enunwa
- Chief (Sir) E. C. Mejuh.

This Synod Coordinating Committee had its inaugural meeting in April 13, 2000 and a follow-up meeting was had during which attention was turned to the terms of reference. The core job centers on the preparation and the planning of the Synod. The committee works out a Synod process which should develop around the fact that:

- The Synod must be a prayerful process of discernment.
- The Synod must be an instrument of Renewal and education.
- The Synod must be an experience of the Church in Aba.
- The Synod must be broad-based and seek wide participation of the faithful in every phase and aspect of its life.
- The Synod process must be one of consultation.
- It should develop the Synod Mission Statement which expresses the hopes and dreams of the Synod.
- It works out under whose patronage the Synod functions, the Synod theme and

formulates the Synod prayer.

- It plans the synodal agenda, paying particular attention to a professional survey of the Diocese (This' survey is demanded for the purpose of gathering reliable data for the Synod).
- It forms the various Preparatory Commissions on matters to be debated and legislated upon by the Synod.

After this, what followed was initiating the consultation stage in the Synod process with the publication of the *Lineamenta* or "outline" document. The *Lineamenta* was intended to generate prayerful reflection on the topic at all levels of the Church in Aba, Abia South. In other words, it was a stage which relies upon the cooperation and prayers of everybody. The *Lineamenta*, gave rise to the workshops and seminars in every parish, community and group. All endeavoured to articulate their ideas and their responses were returned to the coordinating committee. These responses to the *Lineamenta* shall later serve as the basis for the *Instrument Laboris* or a "working document," which will be the center of attention and. discussion at the Synod.

OPENING HOMILY OF THE SYNOD BY THE LOCAL ORDINARY

Into the life of a diocese, as into the lives of men, there comes a time; a great moment, that casts its long shadow into the years ahead, a dramatic moment when the future is fashioned and a mark is left on history that will catch the attention of generations yet unborn. Such a solemn moment is upon us now. Today, we are inaugurating the First Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Aba. Today, we are having a rendezvous with history.

The celebration of this Synod is in a historical tradition that unites us with Christians of many ages. Very likely it was in the fourth century, when the church had gained her freedom and was expanding broadly, that the Synod originated. In the middle Ages, the Fourth Lateran Council required that Synods be held in all dioceses. The Fathers of the Council of Trent discerned that the lack of the Synod was a key to the disasters in the Church of the reformation times. Our own Second Vatican Council urged that Synods "flourish with fresh vigor." "In such a way," the Council Fathers declared, "faith will be deepened and our way of life preserved more fittingly and efficaciously in the various Churches; as the needs of the times require." [quote source]

In 1994, the Church in Africa celebrated with joy and hope its faith in the Risen Christ during the four weeks of the Special 'Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Memories of this event are still fresh in the minds of the whole Ecclesial Community. The Synod Fathers assisted by qualified representatives of the clergy, religious and laity subjected to a detailed and realistic study the lights and shadows,

the challenges and future prospects of evangelization in Africa on the threshold of the Third millennium of the Christian faith.

In 1995, our maiden Pastoral Letter *Mobilize* proposed that we mobilize to build a harmonious and virile Diocese where differences do not become sources of division but of enrichment. I propose that we mobilize, heeding the call of the recently concluded Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of bishops, to build a Diocese that is a Family home built with hearts.

The recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* outlined the Church's path in this new period of history, specifically taking into account two important areas of pastoral commitment: The first entails, "starting afresh from Christ" (ibid., nn. 29-41) and being "witnesses to Love" (ibid., nn. 42-57). [The second is marked by communion and charity, whereby what is decisive is the "Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit", by encouraging "all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life" (ibid., n. 46).

The history of the First Synod to touch the lives of the faithful at Aba goes back to the '80s when Aba was a part of the Diocese of Umuahia.

Please God, the Synod we open today will truly be a prayerful rallying, in this ancient tradition, of the clergy, religious and faithful with their Bishop to discern, embrace and plan for that to which the Spirit is calling us now in this 21st century.

The very word Synod means, "walking together." Today, with a new Vatican II sense of our shared discipleship of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit moving among us, we assemble to set together our course in our shared destiny, our shared pilgrimage into eternal life. We gather committed to creating renewed hearts and renewed spirits for living, announcing and communicating the Good News of Jesus. We gather committed to experiencing and deepening within ourselves a new sense of our true Christian identity. We gather to identify the teething pains and problems of the young Diocese with the aim of anchoring the Diocese on a more solid foundation. We gather to encourage ourselves to continue the work of Christ on earth, with the love of God as its driving force, the will of God as its guide, and eternal life as its end .

We walk together with today's gospel according to John 17: 1-11, which captures the truth about Jesus' relation to God and our relation to Jesus. Jesus is the Mediator through whom we have come to know God. He has' made known the message that God entrusted to him. We in turn have been entrusted with that message by Jesus. As God is glorified in Christ, so Christ is glorified in us. That is an amazing thing when you think about it Christ is glorified in us! The entire message of Christ would have disappeared from this earth if these followers had not spread that message to the ends of the earth.

There is a deep risk on the part of God at the heart of the Christian faith. God entrusts his message to ordinary human beings. He has worked that way from the beginning. The Bible is a long history of God entrusting his message to human beings beginning with Abraham, centering in Jesus, and ending with the apostles. God would not cease to be God if all human beings suddenly or gradually disappeared from the face of the earth, But God would no longer be glorified in Christ on this earth because Christ would no longer be glorified in humankind on this earth. We are the means by which God in Christ is glorified.

In Today's Gospel, too, Jesus prayed for his followers who had been given to him by the Father. We can hear in his words a sense of appreciation for these faithful followers whose lives were entrusted with the mysteries of the kingdom. But Jesus also showed his concern for them, knowing that they belong to the Father.

The fervor that was found in the Apostles and in the early disciples still exists. The zeal to spread the Good News in every land and to every people has never been thwarted. But, what about us, have we become so self absorbed that we cannot be bothered with the mysteries of God's Kingdom? Do we prefer to continue doing our own thing and going our own way? We may prefer to be left alone and never be challenged by the Gospels. Have we become deaf to the proclamation of Gospel's word and God's teaching?

Thankfully, the Lord is patient as he continues to nudge us. With His grace we can move away from ourselves and closer to him. That movement we experience is the Holy Spirit that moved the Apostles and those early disciples to leave the security of their present lives to enter into a greater journey of faith.

My beloved, as we gather through the Synod to evaluate the quality of our faith life, to reflect on our progress in saving our souls and redeeming our world, as we seek to discern what the Spirit is asking of us, as we attempt to cast the fire of a great spiritual renewal upon the earth of Aba, as we delve into this formidable exercise of self-knowledge of our true Christian identity, we come not out of desperation or weakness but out of strength and high expectations. A strength built over the years by the sacrifices, the faith, commitment and, at times, the blood, sweat and tears of

Bishop Joseph Shanahan, Father Eugene Groetz, the Spiritans, Bishop Joseph Whelan, Bishop Anthony Nwedo, our dead heroes: Monsignor J. Nwanegbo, Reverend A. Brown Onwuchekwa, Father Sylvester Nnabugwu, Monsignor Elias Gnuora Makolu, Father Charles C. Nwamaghioha, Father Nathaniel Onyebarchi, Father Emmanuel C. Onwutuebe, Father Benedict 1. Nwolu, Monsignor Theodore E. Ahunanya and Father Emmanuel Nwaokonko and our living icons: Bishop Unegbu, Monsignor Nwafor, Monsignor Eche and our indomitable priests; the tireless self-sacrificing foundation catechists, past and present; our ancestral pioneering faithful; our present hardworking and committed faithful and our founding Holy Rosary

missionary-religious Sisters, the Immaculate Heart Sisters, the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy, the Daughters of Divine Love, Jesus the Saviour Sisters and Hospitaler Sisters of Mercy, religious who have brought the faith to Aba, who have cultivated this garden to this bloom-able stage.

With Pope John XXIII, the Father of the Second Vatican Council, we are aware that the prophets of doom talk of the world becoming worse and worse, and proclaim a future shock, but with Him, we have the faith to perceive the possibility that, amid the anguish, mankind is entering upon a great new order. We perceive in this a divine plan and to it we are committed.

We are here not to be obsessed by negativism and narrow-mindedness. We are here to thrill at a vision of how different, how marvelous our lives and our worlds could be if only we are true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the teaching of His Church.

We are here to ask why, in an age of dizzy technological advancement, we must live in fear. In this age of enlightenment, why do we live in a dark age cycle of corruption, occultism, drugs, violence, crime, shamelessness, depravity, starvation, family disintegration and the scourge of HIV/AIDS? We are desperately in need to be free again in these crushing days of secular humanism, of neo-paganism and de-Christianization to renew our commitment to Him who said that He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly, John 10: 10.

Isn't it time in this crisis that we ask how we can be more faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the Church He established? Isn't it time to ask how we can proclaim it; how we can better assure our own salvation and that of our children in this age of creeping indifferentism, how we can bring the enormous potential of an aroused Christendom to the service of the world, how the Diocese of Aba can better meet the needs of its people?

As a diocese, we are in our teen years. We are ten years old. We are now entering our youthful years of exuberance, energy, exhilaration and bloom to enable us to achieve more fully the fruits of a genuinely understood Vatican II. The 1983 promulgated new Code of Church Law as it concerns, *Ecclesia in Africa* and the recently issued Catechism of the Catholic

Church, require the local dioceses to adapt their more general directives to local needs and conditions. We need to cope with the challenges to Christian living in our day. These challenges and needs will be largely identified through the very extensive listening process with which we are asking your help. I express my deep gratitude for the great sense of enthusiastic cooperation, which is demonstrated by your presence here this morning.

We await the surfacing of issues to be dealt with in our synod. Among them, I expect, will be the development of greater communication within the multi-splendored diversity of our Diocese; greater respect, trust and collaboration; greater unity and greater pride; greater commitment to the living of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church; a better understanding of the Church; greater love for the Church. I see a review of the Christian Formation programs of our Diocese, the future of our schools; Mass attendance; our ministry to the poor and oppressed; meeting the great need for more dedicated priests; reaching out to our youth and young adults; counteracting the proselytizing of our people by the almost amorphous Pentecostal churches that surround us; more effective use of the media; review of our Diocesan priorities; review of parish life and priorities.

I am aware that at this stage much about the Synod is clear to you. I say this because of the long period of discernment we've lived through by the study of the Diocesan Pastoral Guidelines, the Synodal Lineamenta (outline document), the Instrumentum Laboris (working document) which will be the center of attention and referral point for discussion at the Synod, and by having consistently and fervently said the Synod prayer throughout the Diocese.

I deeply appreciate your generous response to this call for the Synod. I beg that all who have any part to play in it, approach it with a sense of deep prayer and docility to the Holy Spirit; a sense of sacrifice, a positive sense of earnest commitment, of openness and of love, of unity, which needs to be associated with so great a work of grace.

There is a passage in Sacred Scripture where the Lord directs Ezekiel the prophet to a field of dry bones and tells him to say to those bones:

... Hear the Word of the Lord ...I will bring Spirit into you, that you may come to life. I will put sinews upon you, make flesh grow over you, cover you with skin, and put Spirit in you so that you may come to life and know that I am the Lord.

This Synod is our opportunity, our challenge to give life to whatever dry bones may be among us, to bring a new Spirit of the Lord, new life among us by your prayers, your commitment, your faith, your loyalty to Jesus, your loyalty to the Church, and with the help of His Mother, Mary. May the Spirit come among us so that this Diocese of ours may ever, more and more, come to life and know that Jesus is Lord.

ACTA PENTECOSTALISM

01. Pentecostalism is a Christian current that emphasizes a post conversion experience of spiritual purification and empowerment which is signaled mostly by utterance in unknown tongues [*glossolia*] decipherable only by a few chosen. As we see it today, it is built up by a fellowship of rash believers who stress the direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit and are marked by following the letters of the Bible. Hence it lays emphasis not so much on the sincerity of what is believed as on frenzied efforts to convince adherents. Understood in this light, Pentecostalism is basically a fanatical fundamentalist type of Protestantism and a strong deviation from the understanding of the Pentecost experience of the apostles in Acts 2.
02. "The Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that by His revelation they might make known new doctrine but that by His assistance they might inviolably keep and faithfully expand the revelation or deposit of faith delivered through the Ages" (First Vatican Council ...) Thus, we consider the infiltration of Pentecostal traits or influences in our Catholic worship as dangerous accretions, and potent forces for a schizophrenic identity rather than a true identity.
03. Praying only "in Jesus name" instead of "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and consequently neither begin nor end prayers with the sign of the Cross nor "through Jesus Christ our Lord": is anti-Catholic and therefore, should be checked. The danger of restricting ourselves to Jesus and not to Jesus Christ is that not every one called Jesus is "Jesus the Christ" and therefore the God-man who alone can lead man to God. Further, even if the Jesus, in whose name Pentecostalism is praying, is identified with Jesus the Christ, the separation of him from the other Divine Persons of the Trinity is a dangerous error. There should be caution on the indiscriminate, thoughtless and disrespectful invocation of the Holy Name, e.g. "Blood of Jesus". Also, such accretion as "Holy Ghost Fire" is unorthodox, blasphemous and certainly not in accordance with the True Christian Identity.
04. The spread of religious anarchy manifested in the abuse of the Sacraments, the Lay Faithful purportedly hearing confessions/counseling, selling of "self consecrated oil" and other oils of anointment to make money, or imposing hands, and anointing one another purporting thereby to be conferring the Holy Spirit is highly condemned. "No one can bestow grace upon himself; it must be given and offered. This fact presupposes ministers of grace, authorized and empowered by Christ and his Church. From these, they receive the mission and faculty (the sacred power) to act in persona Christi capitalis (CCC 875)

05. The subtle anti-Christian mentality of disobedience and of rejection of the authority of ordained ministers of Christ in the Catholic Church by some Catholic victims of Pentecostalism is unacceptable. The obedience of Christ to his Father till death on the cross is a model, and the resemblance to the obedient Christ is a further criterion for determining a true Christian.
06. The role of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary in the economy of our salvation can never be downplayed. Hence, the Eucharist remains the "Source and summit of the Christian life" (LG. 11). It is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of the communion in the divine life and that unity of the people of God by which the Church is kept in being (cf. Congregation of Rites, Instr. Eucharisticum Mysterium, 6). The active participation in the Eucharistic celebration and the faithful involvement in the Church's devotion to the "Blessed Virgin remain intrinsic to building a genuine Christian identity.

HEALING HOMES AND PRAYER CENTERS

07. Healing in Greek - *therapeuo* means "to make whole" "take care", "treat medically" "do service", in Hebrew it is "rapa". There are other words out these are central. This idea shows that the whole human person is involved in many dimensions and healing does not necessarily imply a physical one.
08. Though Jesus made healing a part of his ministry, he did not make it the most important or the only significant sign of faith for Christianity. In other words, he was not there to show how powerful he was or to intimidate the community with the gift of healing as a manifestation to make the Jews believe him.
09. Consequently, the springing up of Healing Homes, Miracle Centers and Prayer Clinics in the Diocese, especially these operated and sponsored by Catholics are incongruous. These healing homes and clinics have in content, theology and practice deviated and continue to deviate from the Catholic teachings and doctrines, consequent upon influence of Pentecostalism. In sincere pursuit of a true Christian identity, the existence of such "homes" and "centers" in the Diocese are hereby banned. More so, both the healers/miracle agents and miracle seekers are banned from receiving the sacraments in the Diocese (Cf Tears for misfortune [*Lacrima Rerum*] Bishop's Pastoral Letter. 1998, pp53-54)

PIOUS SOCIETIES AND ORGANISATIONS

10. We commend the Pious Societies for various contributions they make for the growth of the Church in the Diocese - prayerfulness, team spirit, spirit of

sacrifice, brotherhood and readiness to serve. However, it should be noted that the Pious Societies in the Diocese are to be formed and lived out in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel and fixed norms of the Church in general and of the Diocese in particular, in order to avoid confusing and conflicting multiplicity of Pious Societies (Cf. Can. 305).

11. All of such societies are under the Parish Priest and their finances are under his supervision. The Parish Priest is to be respected, irrespective of his age.
12. The already recognized Pious Societies must know that their devotions must be in accordance with the teachings, practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church. In this connection, we condemn in no equivocal terms, the situation where the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria (CCRN), Catholic Biblical Instructors Union (C.B.LU), Catholic Biblical Movement (C.B.M), Catholic Youth Organization (CYON), conduct their own interviews, counseling, quasi confessions and determine dates for the church wedding of their respective member; thereby interfering with the pastoral care of all the faithful that belongs solely to the Parish Priest (can 515). Any persistence in these unhealthy practices would be blamed squarely on the leaders of these societies who will face severe sanctions
13. All Pious Societies, Organization, Movement and Union must open and operate accounts with Chibueze Community Banks or any other Bank, as long as they obtain, through their Parish Priest, a letter of authorization from the Bishop.
14. We recognize the existence of the three basic organizations in the church namely, Catholic Men Organization (C.M.O), Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O) and the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), and urge every parishioner, depending on his or her status, to belong to any of these organizations. The members of the various Organization, Unions and Movements must realize that they owe allegiance to these mother-bodies (CMO, CWO, CYO) and so have no authority to form splinter groups, which refuse to belong to the these Mother-Bodies.

EVANGELISATION I LITURGY

15. In the words of Pope Paul VI evangelization means, "bringing the Good news into all strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new" (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* n.18). In other words, when the Church seeks to convert (Rom 1: 18), solely through the divine power of the message, both the personal and collective consciences of people as well as the activities in which they engage; the church evangelizes. Evangelization therefore is a complex process made up of varied

elements. The renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner-adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs and apostolic imitative.

16. Since the task of evangelization is given to every baptized Christian (Mt. 28: 19,20), every Catholic faithful in Aba must be committed towards carrying out this enormous task, stretching from the principles of adequate proclamation of Christ's Gospel of the kingdom of God, through the norms for authentic enculturation of Christianity, to the Christ-Royalisation of every nook and cranny of the society within the catholic Diocese of Aba
17. Considering the constellation of our Diocese with regard to diversities in spoken dialects, those working in the Diocese especially priests, should strive to be vast in as many Igbo dialects as possible. Rural evangelization, for example, is likely to be enhanced if priests understand and use the vernacular effectively.
18. All concerned should intensify their efforts and commitments towards a proper and adequate formation of our Diocesan priests and priestly candidates for their ministry. This will fortify them to tackle the myriad of problems and challenges facing the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the 21st Century. The principles and content of formation as enunciated in the Document of the second Vatican council .. - *Optatam Totius*; *John Paul II's Pastoral Dabo Vobis* (1992) nnA2-51 , *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), n.75, should always be a *vade mecum*.
19. Equally, Catechists, "the primary collaborators of the priests in their ministry of evangelization" should receive proper training; always update their knowledge of the faith, moral and social teaching of the church. This will enable them to "assure the daily organization of village comities and Urban neighbourhoods, in order to make of them living fraternal groups, vital cells of the great ecclesial family" (*Synodus Episcoporum Coetus Specialis Pro Africa: Nyntius: Critate Vaticana* 1994p.23).
20. Parishes in the diocese should see it as a primary duty to maintain their catechists and complement their efforts with considerable remuneration.
21. Liturgy, the *Culmen et fons*, the apex and source of the Christian life (cf. Vatican Council II: *Sacrosanctum Concillium* n; 10), should always be celebrated in a manner that effects the sanctification of the members and ultimate glorification of God (cf. *Pastoral Care of The Sick. Rites of Anointing* p.23). This calls for active, conscious and effective participation in all liturgical celebrations.

22. The Liturgy must not be encumbered with unnecessary additions, which often cause distractions. Noble brevity, simplicity, sobriety and practicality must characterize liturgical celebrations (cf. S.C. nn 10,14)
23. Priests must follow laid-down rules of celebration in matters of choice of text, application of rubrics and use of rites
24. Preaching of Sermons and homilies are duties of Priests and Deacons and this should be well prepared and delivered very briefly and in a befitting non-pentecostalist Catholic manner.
25. All the faithful must acquaint themselves with the new General Instructions on the Roman Missal to facilitate their active participation during liturgical celebrations.
26. Such major activities as launching and fundraising should be done after post-communion prayer. Both the priests and the people should note that these ceremonies do not bring to an end the Eucharistic celebration; it is rather the final Blessing given by the priest at the end of the mass that does.
27. We commend the Ministry of Hospitality in the work they are doing and urge them to continue to maintain orderliness and decorum especially during Holy Communion. All participants at our liturgies are enjoined to respect them.
28. There should be proper preparation and instruction for prospective Extraordinary lay ministers of Holy Communion.
29. The faithful must get accustomed to the correct gestures and comportment. e.g. kneeling to receive Final Blessings, using Holy Water for the proper purpose, receiving communion not more than two times a day; provided the person concerned is there from the beginning of the mass etc. (can. 917). Besides, the Eucharistic celebration has a unitary nature, hence, those who wish to receive communion must be there at the introduction rites.
30. Priests must be aware of their leadership role or centrality of their role at Mass. The idea of participating and concelebrating when they are late is frowned upon (cf. IGMR nn.335-337; 346-347).
31. Since music, within the African framework of enculturation, takes up a very prominent place, it should be approached with the same dignity and soberness characteristic of the whole Catholic Liturgy. There is urgent need for the compilation of a theologically and doctrinally well articulated Diocesan hymn Book to guard against errors and most especially to enhance uniformity without sacrificing diversity and catholicity.

32. Public Prayers, most especially the prayer of the faithful, and private prayers, should maintain the Catholic form and outlook. The prayer of the faithful is part of the ministry of the Word. The people having listened to the Word and having been challenged by the Word should respond to the Word by praying in the light of the Word for the needs of the Church, of all humankind, and for the local community. The prayer of the faithful opens out the Word to World, praying for its healing, enlightenment and guidance. Priests and other members of Christ's faithful are advised to abide by the Principles and norms guiding prayer of-the faithful (cf the new General Instructions on the Roman Missal, July 2000, nn 69-71).
33. We encourage strongly, the formation of a liturgical Committee in every parish to help check unnecessary infiltrations and aberration in our liturgical celebration
34. Every Catholic faithful must note that **Sunday** is the *Yom Yahweh* (the day of the Lord). It is the day to be kept holy. "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy" (Ex 20:8, Deut. 5: 12). It is a day of rest (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, on keeping "The Lord's Day Holy" 31, May 1998, nn 64-65
35. No one has the right to take away that which belongs to the Lord and replace it with personal engagements, especially secular meetings and/or trading. All are called upon to change attitude and return to that commandment of the Lord which invites all to dedicate the whole day (Sunday or holy days of Obligation) as much as possible to the Eucharistic celebration, Benediction, Bible Studies, Catechesis and prayers (cf. 1 bid)

PARISHES AND RECEPTION OF SACRAMENTS

36. A parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop is entrusted to a Parish Priest as its proper pastor (cf. can 515)
37. For the creation of new parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Aba, the following laid down norms and conditions must be adhered to:
 - i. There must be a presbytery, domestic staff quarters, a garage and a Kitchen, all walled in.
 - ii. There must be some acceptable measure of security
 - iii. There should be a population of real Catholics of not less than 1000

- iv. There must be Electricity and steady source of There must be a vehicle that is in good working order; the particulars and the key must be handed over to the Bishop before hand.
 - v. The would-be parish must hand over to the Bishop a drinking water.
 - vi. Bank account of at least N250,000 (two hundred and fifty thousand Naira) for Urban Areas, and not less than N150,000 (One hundred and fifty thousand Naira) for the Rural Area, as surety for maintenance in difficult times.
 - vii. The priests of the Vicariate are to give the final report to the Bishop as to whether the area is to be erected into a parish or not.
 - viii. While the most determinant factor is the demography, the prospective parish must also maintain a reasonable distance from the mother parish,
 - ix. There must be significant land for expansion and development
 - x. The mother parish should provide the new parish with a complete set of Mass Box.
38. The Diocesan policy concerning finances III parishes remains as follows:
- i. There should be a finance committee in every parish
 - ii. Every parish should have two separate accounts
 - iii. The parish priests is accountable to the Bishop for ministerial account which consists of church collections, stole fees, and Mass stipends (bination, trination)
 - iv. The Non-ministerial or Parish Account, which consists of the Harvest/Bazaar proceeds, launching, donations made intuitu missionis or any sales, is operated by the Parish Priest, the vice-chairman of the Parish Council and they are accountable to the Parish.
 - v. There should be collaboration between the Diocesan Finance Council and the parish Finance committee.
39. To enhance the sense of accountability, especially in the economic life of the parishes, every parish and the pious societies within the Diocese are mandated to open an account at the Diocesan Bank (Chibueze Community Bank) (cf. no 11 above)
40. With full awareness that the flames of ecumenical efforts should be fanned in every parish, and taking into consideration the Pastoral Orientation from the catechetical practice of the Ancient Church in the time of the Church fathers, we make the following guidelines for the reception of sacraments in our parishes.
- i. Three years of catechetical instruction should precede the receptions of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist and Penance. This calls for stricter adherence to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

- ii. The canonical minimum period of three months preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Matrimony must be faithfully observed. This sacrament should never be rushed. The contemporary Nigerian rush-and-grab mentality should be overcome rather than be transferred into ecclesial life.
- iii. The liturgy of Sunday, or solemnity takes precedence over any other. Therefore, the liturgy for church weddings cannot supplant it.
- vi. Church weddings in the parishes should be held only on Saturdays, or any other day of the week as may be the case during Easter and Christmas Seasons. Only Mary League Girls may be accorded the privilege to wedding on Sundays, if the couples so wish, and in mutual agreement with the parish priest.

MESSAGE TO WOMEN, YOUTH, SEPARATED BRETHREN AND MEMBERS OF OTHER RELIGIONS

- 41. With happy memories, we pay glowing tribute to our women for their various contributions to the Church. We acknowledge the wonderful execution of their role as sisters and mothers to priests. This shows that the dimensions of mother and sister are two fundamental dimensions of the relationship between women and priests. In this perspective Saint Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy to treat "Older women like mothers, younger women like sisters in all purity" (Tim 5:2; cf. Letter of Pope John Paul II to priests, for Holy Thursday 1995, P.11-12)
- 42. However, we frown at the unwholesome attitude observable among some women and young girls in some of our Parish Houses, and declare that the privacy of Parish House is to be upheld.
- 43. Visits to the Father's houses at odd times/hours is highly discouraged and efforts should be made by all parties to eradicate totally the scandal of the weak while thereby remembering the Lord's prayer "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from all evil"
- 44. Further, the Church in Aba, just like the universal Church, is cognizant of the fact that the youth are both the present and future of humanity (cf. Ecclesia in Africa, n. 93). The predicament of the young people of today, their expectations and anxieties, occasioned by misrule, joblessness, social inadequacies, drug abuse and cultism are of great concern to the Dioceses
- 45. While we sympathize with the youth, they are thereby called upon to live above these ills, because recourse to indiscipline and indecency of life can never be solutions to their problems. They should, as Christians, never lose hope in any situation. They must have recourse to Christ our model and to his mother our intercessor with confidence.

46. Also, we recall with passion, Christ's prayer that all his followers may be one (In. 17:21). The search for this unity has been the pastoral priority of the Catholic Church for a meaningful evangelization since the Second Vatican Council.
47. We make our own, the words of the Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II, that *"we must do all we can to heal the memories of past misunderstandings and promote new attitudes based on forgiveness, mutual esteem and respect. We must resist all hostility and every spirit of rivalry between us, so that we may engage resolutely through mutual collaboration in the building of our churches The field of cooperation is vast. It should begin with the improvement of fraternal relations on levels, but most particularly among those who have the task of leadership"* (Pope John Paul II, Address to the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, on June 11, 1993 in L'Osservatore Romano June 16, 1993. p.5)
48. Our Ecumenical openness should begin with spiritual ecumenism. The measure of our concern for unity is to the degree to which we pray for it. "To pray together is to be drawn together" (cf. W.C.C Publication, Geneva, 1988, p 191).
49. We therefore invite our separated brethren to observe and celebrate with us the week of prayer for Christian unity, 18- 25th January every year.
50. We suggest to all the Christian faithful to celebrate the yearly mothering Sunday on the same day (as we do for Easter and Christmas) and the works of charity/mercy that follow this celebration be made an ecumenical activity.
51. Let all Christians join hands together towards the enhancement of all those programs that will alleviate the suffering of the less privileged in our society.
52. Since one of the cardinal aims of ecumenism is mutual enrichment, the members of different churches are encouraged to be well grounded in their doctrines and understand them properly. Authentic Ecumenism must proceed from the position of strength, thus, neither half-baked Catholics nor half-baked Anglicans, are useful for 'meaningful Ecumenism.
53. All overzealous Catholic Ecumenists (Ecumaniacs) of different Catholic groups are advised to always ensure that their members acquire sufficient and authentic Catholic instrument to enable them dialogue meaningfully with members of other churches. They should further the training of prospective members whenever the need arises in recognized Catholic theological colleges and institutes.

54. We reaffirm our commitment to Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and recognize it as a way of uniting and strengthening Christians towards common objective and projects.
55. Our Diocese also recalls with joy the common biblical bond existing between Christianity and Islam and sees this as a wonderful opportunity for mutual cooperation.
56. Those Moslems resident within the Diocese are reassured of our continued love. Consequently, all acts of lawlessness and wanton destruction of lives and property perpetrated in our midst in the name of religion are hereby condemned in strongest terms. The sacredness of life is nonnegotiable and .the right to life ever inviolable. We uphold recourse to dialogue and legal means as ways of settling disputes.
57. Besides, we recognize some of these positive elements inherent in our traditional religion. However, the introduction and infiltration of non-Christian elements into our Christian way of life, as is practiced in many quarters in the name of enculturation or still as remnants of the spirit of the time, is intolerable.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

58. Education is in a very special way, the concern of the Church, Not only because the church must be recognized as a human society capable of imparting education but especially it has the duty of proclaiming the way of salvation to all human beings [men], of revealing the life of Christ to the those who believe, and of assisting them with unremitting care so that they may be able to obtain to the fullness of that life. Drawing from the example of Christ (Malt 5:1-12) and his special command to the apostles (Mt. 28:20), the central role of education in the evangelization of our people and their culture is emphatic.
59. The efforts being made in many parishes to establish more Catholic nursery, Primary, secondary schools, and Day care centers are joyfully acknowledged. They are clear signs of God's love and mercy. Parents and Guardians are thus, reminded of their obligation of availing themselves of these opportunities to ensuring sound religious and moral education for our children who are the future of the Church as well as the society at large' (Cf. Gravissimum Educationis n.7; (nnc-226)2793) 1,774)2,776)
60. To guarantee high quality education for our mission schools, the establishment of tertiary institution for the training of teachers both at the diocesan and inter

diocesan levels has become very necessary. The recruitment of dedicated and competent teachers, their denominational affiliation notwithstanding, to teach non-doctrinal key-courses, is to be given serious attention. More so, doctrinal/religious instruction schemes should be inserted in the nursery/primary schools curriculum of studies and priests and religious are obliged to teach catechism and Catholic doctrines.

61. Since Education is a service rendered for the overall good of the society, the Government and society at large must be fully committed to her financial obligations and responsibilities of supporting and sponsoring mission schools.

62. Recognizing the irreplaceable role of education: for the development of the society and in the evangelization of our people, the Dioceses of Aba should intensify her effort in the establishment of more schools, while a committee has to be set up to look into the issue of the state return of mission-schools within the Diocese

63. To [assuage] discourage the fear of teachers in the event of Government return of schools, the formation of an Association of Catholic Teachers to enable such teachers boost their confidence and enhance dialogue with the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is recommended.

64. The advent of the new and more sophisticated communication technologies and ideas is no doubt, the good news of the 21st century. We welcome the positive changes such new technologies are capable of bringing to our lives. However, due to their almost ubiquitous nature, most especially in our urban area, we take exception to the far-reaching efforts of Internet and satellite technologies. Hence, the faithful are exhorted to make use of these technologies but to be critical in their assessment of their content since as Shakespeare says "all that glitters is not gold".

65. Catholics should use the web to better their lives and deepen their faith by visiting those sites that are capable of enriching their knowledge positively. On the other hand, the misuse of the web for criminal and immoral purposes, for the spreading of hate and violence in the world, for the exploitation of the poor and the weak most especially children, is strongly condemned.

66. The lay faithful are encouraged to study at recognized catholic institutions like CIWA. They should do this not only for the purpose of understanding better the teachings of the Church in a changing world but more so for the purpose of relating the teaching of the Church to new technologies and ideas.

67. In the area of Mass Media, we welcome with joy the near affordability of some necessary means of Mass Media and communication like Radios and

Television, Satellite Dishes and cable connections; Nonetheless, we bemoan the misuse of these means for entertainment and leisure only; ,the misuse has almost initiated a new culture of viewing and relaxation and thus, undermining a culture of reading and critical reflection. Against this background, we encourage a massive literacy and enlightenment campaign for adequate utilization of the Mass media.

68. Since the Diocesan Newspaper Rex stands out tall in this campaign, the entire Catholic faithful are called upon to patronize and fund it.
69. Accordingly, as a medium of evangelization, the Rex Newspaper should have a clear focus and strategy to make itself more effective. Unlike secular means of Mass Media and communication, which could be misused for anti-Catholic and anti-Church activities and negative propaganda, it should consistently devote columns to handle different aspects of the Church's teaching in matters of doctrine, faith and morals.
70. To build a strong stand in this area, a well informed editorial Board of priests and lay scholars has to be put in place to ensure that whatever is published is in accord with the teachings of the Church .
71. More so, we endorse the use of pool films, CDs, DVDs and tapes that document such occasions as Corpus Christi, Chrism Mass, Ordinations, Marriages, Baptism, Religious Profession etc, for grass-root evangelization most especially in the rural areas.
72. Traditional means of evangelization such as the ringing of Angelus bells, rallies and revivals, and recourse to locally suitable media for evangelization are also upheld.

JUSTICE, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE COMMISSION [JDPC]

73. God in the Old Testament showed his high regard and love for the poor and downtrodden the *Anawim* of Israel. Thus, He sent many prophets to decry social ills and injustices in society. Christ toed the same line in the propagation of the Gospel during his earthly ministry. Following the footsteps of her Lord and Master, the universal Church established the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (J.P.). But because development is topical in the social agenda of the modem world, the African Church introduced the complementary term Development as an integral term to the other two. While, evangelization and integral human development are intimately linked on the one hand, on the other hand, "integral development implies respect for human dignity and this can only be achieved in justice and peace" (Ecclesia in Africa n.69). It is on the strength of this that Justice, Development and Peace

Commission (J.D.P.C.) came to be born, and made operative at National, Provincial and Diocesan levels.

74. In union with the universal Church, and in order to fulfill her pastoral mandate and agenda with regard to her social ministry, there is need to establish and put into effective use this organ in the Diocese.
75. As a pastoral organ of the Church's social ministry, it would be involved in the integral development of peoples. Its functions include: mobilization, enlightenment and activation of peoples, promoting campaigns in matters of social justice and general issues concerning human rights, enlightening our Christian faithful in such areas as creation of jobs, employment and investment opportunities.
76. In the evident context of the disparity of wealth in the society at large and our Diocese in particular, the J.D.P.C. should help in equitable distribution of resources and national wealth. It has to address the issue of just remuneration and salaries, nay, social welfare of Church workers for services rendered.
77. As a matter of urgency, it should look into the twinning of richer parishes with poor ones, not only for the purpose of bridging the gap between the " rich and the poor, but more importantly, to make evident in practice, the bond of love existing among Christians as practiced by the early Christian communities.
78. The Diocesan Bishop as the chairman of the J.D.P.C. is to appoint a priest or lay person as coordinator as well as other lay faithful as members of the commission.

HEALTH /ETHICAL ISSUE

79. Good health is paramount in the actualization of our noble goals in life. It is on this note that we have observed with great concern the increasing incidents of avoidable deaths and widespread scourge of preventable diseases among our people. Since our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, the need to maintain good health for productive, meaningful and relatively good and happy life should be seen as a religious obligation.
80. The faithful should endeavour to take pains to get informed and be informed of the dangers of diseases in their lives as Christians and citizens. Hence, the scourge of AIDS, STD and other avoidable diseases should be seen within the framework of our duties and omissions.
81. Avoidance of pre-marital sex, marital fidelity and chastity remains the basic conditions for preventing HIV/AIDS, STD transmission. Couples are also

advised, to conduct pre-conjugal screening to reduce the incidence of sickle-cell diseases.

82. The Diocese is resolved to be part of the campaign for good health care services. In this regard, we implore all Catholics to join resources to updating all the Mission Health-Care Centers in the Diocese, most especially, St. Joseph's Hospital, Ohabiam.
83. On abortion and Euthanasia/Mercy Killing, we join our voice to that of the universal Church to condemn these as sins against the supreme value of human life. The erroneous idea circulating among some Christ's faithful that unwanted pregnancy is a sickness is also condemned in very strong terms. We uphold the Church's stand against contraception/artificial birth control and against their legalization.
84. Furthermore, materialism has been identified as a virus, which works against our calling to fraternal love, to justice and to fair play. The corruption that goes with it destroys the culture of truth and charity and so corrodes and corrupts the Christian identity.
85. The faithful are therefore called upon to guard against the virus of materialism in its entire ramifications as found spreading today even among priests and religious. Since virtue stands in the middle, there must be moderation in the pursuit of material wealth as well as in its use. "What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul" (Matt. 16:26). -

CHRISTIAN BURIAL

86. As enshrined in the Code of Canon Law, it is the right of a truly baptized Christian to receive a Church funeral at death. This entails the right of the Holy Mass celebrated for him/her both at vigil and the proper *exquiae* (Can. 1176)
87. However, in the wake of the atrocities and debased activities taking place during Wake-Keeping, the faithful in Aba are henceforth restricted only to the Vigil Mass. Thus, Wake-Keeping from dusk to dawn is banned.
88. The burial of any diseased faithful in the Diocese must take place within four weeks after the day of death. And, the Parish Priest must be informed of the death immediately it occurs.
89. While avoiding all forms of superstitions, the place of burial is left to the choice of the family of the diseased. (CC. 1180).

90. The place for the celebration of funeral rites should be according to the speculations of the law (cf. CC. 1177).

HOMILY OF THE LOCAL ORDINARY DURING THE SYNOD CLOSING LITURGY

As Christians, we do have a powerful force in our lives. It is a presence, which is never physically seen or heard but is alive and active in us. The most powerful force in the universe is invisible. It is a powerful force, which is given to us as a promise from Jesus Christ. It is a presence of power, which is conferred upon us at the time of confirmation. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We could rightfully call the Holy Spirit, "the force" in our lives. With the power of the Holy Spirit we can live as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit empowers us to embrace the struggles of day-to-day life and can rid our lives of the fears, which hold us in bondage. The Spirit can empower us to share our gifts with one another and fill our lives with knowledge and the wisdom of God in order to banish the doubts and uncertainties of life. The Spirit can strengthen our faith and trust in God amid the temptations and evils of this world. The Spirit is the life-giving force of God in our lives.

This feast of Pentecost is a major feast of the Church. It is so important because it is a celebration of the perpetual, powerful presence of God in and through the Holy Spirit in the Church. For the giving of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate example of the invisible power of God unleashed upon the world. More than a fulfilled promise of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the driving force of unity and evangelization in the Church. It is this force, which unites all of the followers of Jesus into his body. It is this force, which goes forth into the world to teach, challenge, convert, and bring peace. The Spirit, like fire, melts the heart, burns up the dross, and enkindles pious and devout affections in the soul. This is that fire which Christ came to send upon the earth. Wind, heat, breath, language - all these are invisible, powerful images of the influence of God's Spirit within us; but all images that are full of force, change, and vitality. Perhaps that is one way to describe the life of a Christian - we are changed people, full of God's life, agents for change in the name and power of God.

The work of Christ in giving us the Holy Spirit is the work of bringing us to a language that we can all understand. It is the work of **re-ligio**, of religamenting, of bringing the bare bones, dried because of lack of love, back into one body filled with the blood of Christ. The work of Christ in sending us His Holy Spirit is that of making us His blood brothers and sister. The work of Christ is that of reconciling, of forgiving, of loosening that which binds us up in our isolation and our sterile self-centeredness. The work of the crucified Christ who has now risen by his own power and evident in the power of the Holy Spirit, is at work in bringing a holistic communion to a people that is alienated, fractured, shattered, and divided by the

ravages of hatred when they could have loved. The work of Christ and the Holy Spirit is overcoming sin. Sin is the name of all that has caused us to waste our chances to be better persons, to hurt, divide, and separate us from each other and from God.

When we open our lives to the power of the Spirit, great things will happen in us and through us. The Spirit can speak the truths of God through us if we give him our voices. The Spirit can touch broken lives, heal divisions and impart forgiveness if we give him our hearts. The Spirit can lift burdens, dry tears, and do great works of charity if we give him our hands. We would be amazed at the power we have, as a Church and as individuals, if only we allow the Spirit to work within us.

Today we, the brothers and sisters in the Lord, of Abia South and Oyiibo are gathered 2000 years later, not in Jerusalem but in Aba, giving thanks for the Spirit that moves among us, giving thanks especially for the Spirit that has moved among us through the Synod process which we formally complete today. During this period, the members of the Synod, its Commissions, its Secretariat, the collaborating committees, parishes and organizations, have all walked together. Truly many members, many ages, many states of life - we have all walked together, all of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit. Together we have earnestly sought to discern what the Spirit is asking of us. As a community of faith, we seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ in sanctifying ourselves and our world, in living together in peace and joy and the happy expectation of spending an eternity with our Father in Heaven. This Synod is God's gift to the Church in Aba.

Today, we place the fruit of our work upon the altar. Today the Church of Abia South prays in holy union for its Bishop that, guided by the Spirit, he might respond to the recommendations he has received and, after his own prayerful discernment, promulgate the results of the Synod.

Today, anew, we walk together in pilgrimage to the Holy Spirit, asking His grace as we conclude one stage of this process of searching for our Christian identity and planning our faith life and as we enter an even more important stage of preparing to implement among us - in every family, parish, institution in our community - what we heard the Spirit saying.

At this point, I wish to express my profound appreciation and to beg abundant blessings of the Holy Spirit upon all who have been involved in the Synod process - Father Nwokenna as Promoter, Mrs Emily Emeagi as Secretary, the other Secretaries; Very Reverend Monsignor Ralph A. Nwosu and Very Reverend Professor John Egbulefu as Delegate Presidents, Father William Onwundi as factotum, Father Stan. Achoromadu, the Rector of St. Mary's Propaedeutic Seminary, Azumini - Ndoki, Fr. Norbert Nwakwuo, the Pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Azumini, His Majesty the Eze and the people of Azumini, Professor Bishop A. Iwuagwu, the Anglican Bishop of Aba, the members of the Synod Body, the members of the

various Synod Commissions and committees, the Secretariat, the facilitator (Fr. Prof. Innocent Asouzu), our resource persons and collaborators on the level of the parishes and institutions, our computer operators/typists, the cuisine department, the security, the Diocesan guards, our sound system operator, the electrician, the plumber, the transporters, - all by their efforts in this great search, renewal and pastoral planning process which will enrich the lives of the priests, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Aba for generation to come.

At a workshop on the Synod, I pointed out the need for the faithful to gather in the ancient ecclesial tradition of a Synod to discern, embrace, plan and search for that to which the Spirit is calling us as we approach the 21 st century. With a sense of our shared discipleship of the Holy Spirit moving among us, we assembled to set together our course and our shared destiny, our shared pilgrimage into eternal life. We committed ourselves to creating renewed hearts and renewed spirits for living, announcing and communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ. We gathered committed to search and experience our true Christian identity. We placed our Synod under the patronage of Christ the King imploring that the Diocese be Christ-royalised.

During this Synod process, painful at times as it may have been, we were conscious that, in the words of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn; to place on those who mourn .. a diadem instead of ashes, to give them oil in place of mourning, a glorious mantle Instead of listless spirit."

As we praise the Lord for what we have achieved in responding to the Spirit moving among us, and as we look to the future, as we attempt to cast the fire of a great spiritual renewal upon the earth of Abia South and Oyigbo, we realize with thanksgiving that we come not out of desperation or weakness, but out of strength and high expectations. It is a strength that has been built over the years by the sacrifices, the faith commitment and at times the blood, sweat and tears of the great clergy, faithful and religious who brought the faith to Abia South and who have cultivated this garden so that it is ready to bloom.

By the grace of the spirit, can we not be part of a new awakening? Is it not a time for old men to dream dreams and for young men to have visions, a time to awaken among us the zeal of our Blessed Tansi - who in his challenging times regained for thousands the enriching full living of the abundant life? Is it not time for Camelot? Is it not time for asking not what the Church can do for me, but what can I do for the Church - my Diocese and my country?

The Holy Spirit is calling us to greatness, to greatness of vision and purpose. He is not calling us at this time to small-mindedness, to narrow, petty criticism, to negative reactions to the past, to fanning controversies or to feeding sectarian interests. We are being called to a positive, great-hearted approach of a holy people, of faith-filled people, motivated exclusively by the single question: "How can we trigger an explosion in living and sharing the abundant life of Jesus?" What is being asked of us is to confront the failings of our times; but, even more, to re-ignite a great renewed age of faith, to release a new age of the spirit among us, our children, our diocese, our beloved community, to be true to the potential that is ours.

As we look forward now to the implementation of the Synod, earnestly responding to the spirit moving among us, may we be aware of the words of St. Paul to the early Christians who received power when the Holy Spirit came upon them to be witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout Judea and Samaria - yes, even to the ends of the earth.

You are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building, which rises on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the capstone. Through Him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as the Holy Temple in the Lord; in Him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God and the Spirit.¹⁵

May the people of God of this Diocese rejoice in the fruits of this Synod and undertake under the patronage of Our Mother Mary to walk together in the task of embodying in our lives its resolutions.