

**THE PROVINCE OF NIGERIA:
OUR COMMITMENT TO INTERCULTURALITY AS A PROVINCE.**

“ The message is destined for a great diversity of persons and of culture: it is therefore, expressed in different ways according to the requirements of time and place. We shall frequently question ourselves as to whether our way of life is genuinely adapted to the mentality and circumstances of the people among whom we live. Our mission is communion. The Spirit, at work in the world, invites us to recognize and respect each people in its own culture, its history, its faith and beliefs. Ready to share all that we are, we are equally open to receive from others in the context of their values, the word or gesture which evangelizes us. (Constitution no. 16)

C . 1. For more effective inculturation, we use appropriate means to learn the language of the country, and willingly devote the necessary time to this task. We also set ourselves to acquire an understanding of the traditions, cultures and religions of the places where we live. ”

As Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, interculturality is very essential to our calling right from the outset when Fr. Planque drew young women from different parts of the world to form the foundation of the Congregation. The sisters were to learn to understand, accept, respect, tolerate and live in harmony and joy with one another. They drew strength and courage from the richness in their differences and committed themselves to mission, not nationality. It is the same for us today. Interculturality, therefore, is not only an inevitable phenomenon in our lives as OLA, but one, in which we are committed to. We have never been more challenged as today, to be living witnesses to love and unity in diversity to our world turn apart by hatred, wars, anger and selfishness where everybody is concerned only for himself and his own.

As a province, interculturality is inevitable for us considering the makeup of our country. (Nigeria is populated by over one hundred and fifty million people with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, languages and as many cultures).

Nigeria as a highly multicultural nation invariably affects the makeup of our communities where we have sisters from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, some of our communities are privileged to have sisters from other provinces as their members.

In our province, we live interculturality in different ways, in the communities, our apostolates and in our formation.



**Interculturality
in our
communities**

First of all, in our communities, sisters are aware that they are from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we relate with one another by being open and sensitive to others

feelings. As people living together for the same purpose, we acknowledge and focus on the bond that binds us together, that is Christ. We endeavour to understand, respect, accept and accommodate each other in love despite our differences. We harness our differences and harvest the richness of each individual person.

As a community, we also endeavour to learn the language of the people with whom we live and work. This has an added advantage to the quality of our witnessing as it draws us closer to the people and makes the gospel of Christ to take root in their lives.

Following the injunctions of the General Chapters on Language Policy, each community devices a means suitable for them to learn and practice the French Language.

Our community prayers and liturgical celebrations are garnished with songs, hymns and rituals from different countries and cultures. Inculturation adds creativity and beauty to our prayers and liturgies.

We also enrich our menu in the community with food from different cultures. When a new sister from an entirely different cultural background joins a community, the community tries to include something from the sister's culture in the menu when possible. Hence, our sisters are known to have 'missionary stomach'.

During community celebrations like birthdays, Feast days, Anniversaries, Christmas, Easter, e.t.c. the sisters dress in their different cultural attires to celebrate the love of God.

Interculturality in our communities add richness, colour, strength and beauty to our lives and enables us to best bring the love of Christ home to each other and to the people we are sent.

In the different units that make up the Province we discussed and came up with elements necessary for us to develop a culture of welcoming. We intend to put all together into a booklet that will help us to live the culture of welcoming.



**Interculturality
in our
Apostolates. . .**

We availed of the knowledge that Sr Catherine Esiekpe gained from her participation in the workshop on Interculturality facilitated by Sr. Angel Nikki for the OLA Sisters in Tanzania. She organized a workshop for all the Sisters of the Lagos Unit of the Province.

Arrangements have been made for a formation Programme on interculturality for the Sisters who will be the foundation members of the Badagry Community.



Our apostolates are opened to all kinds of people. We work with people from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs: Christians, Muslims, Traditional worshippers and people from different nationalities without preferences.

We also try to inculcate cultural tolerance and understanding in the people with whom we work. For instance, in our schools an extra-curriculum activity – Cultural Week – is dedicated to interculturality. It is usually a week long programme whereby the pupils/students in their different cultural groups display different aspects of their cultures. The Sisters, Parents, Teachers and invited dignitaries participate actively. The riches of different cultures are showcased.





The different cultural groups

They display different cultural songs, dances and dramas.



They also present their local food and eat from one another's dishes. It is usually a very colourful and interesting cultural carnival in the schools.

Such activities are aimed to:

- Preach the Gospel of love by encouraging inter-ethnic, inter-tribal and inter-cultural relations among people from different cultural backgrounds.
- Understand and appreciate oneself in other to understand and appreciate others.
- Accept and accommodate one another which enhance learning and communal living.
- Enhance unity in diversity.
- Eradicate suspicion, hatred, tribalism and individualism which lead to conflict and war.

These intercultural activities have often yielded many fruits. It has been the experience of our sisters in the schools that after such activities:

- The relationships among students and even parents and staff are more harmonized. There is always more freedom in relating with one another.
- People become more interested in one another and tend to understand one another better.
- There is appreciation, even admiration for other cultures. There is an understanding that one does not have it all.
- It reduces quarrels and name-calling of other cultures among students. It promotes respect for others.
- It sells out the name of the schools and sisters, and more people want to associate with the school and the sisters.
- It makes the young people who are the leaders of tomorrow to grow up with the right orientation about others who are different from them.
- It promotes the Gospel of Christ – Love among people.

In all, the programme tends to send this message to our society, to our world: " **though we are diverse and different, we are all sons and daughters of the earth. We eat from the earth, breath the same air; enjoy the same sunshine and rain. We are the children of the same father, God, who has given us these out of love. "**

Interculturality in our Formation. . .

Aspirancy: The sisters are able to live interculturality of course, because of the formation they have received. From the onset, our aspirants are presented with the fact that we are missionaries and an international congregation. This is continued during the postulancy.

Postulancy: The postulants are given orientation in other to help them accept each other and be able to live with one another. One way we do this is by organizing an intercultural activity whereby each of the postulants shares with the others, her cultural heritage: the history of her people, occupation, language, food, e.t.c. A day is allocated to celebrate each postulant's culture. She prepares meals from her culture with the involvement of others. She also dresses in her cultural attire and shares with the others the history of her people and

their cultural values. She introduces the meals and prayer in said over the meals in her local language. She then dishes from the food and invites others to share the richness of God in her culture.



This activity helps each postulant to celebrate herself and to celebrate one another.

It helps to bring to light and re-affirms different cultural values. The exercise goes a long way in making them to appreciate themselves and others, to open up to other cultures, which fosters understanding, respect, acceptance and tolerance. It also helps the postulants to begin to live peacefully and constructively and develop a sense of community and belonging. It opens them up to perceive diversity as an enrichment rather than a threat.

Part of the Postulancy is dedicated to learning of French Language. Right on resumption, the postulants are introduced to the language. Our Postulate also participates in the six months language course which comprises of exchange of postulants between Nigeria, Ghana and the Francophone Provinces. This unique and beautiful intercultural activity not only avail the postulants of the opportunity to learn English or French as the case may be, but also makes them to experience mission as well as intercultural community living at this early stage.

Novitiate: Our Novitiate by its very nature is a multicultural one. The entire Novitiate Programme is organised in such a way that it has intercultural undertone for the novices are being prepared for mission which warrants intercultural community living.

There is one week orientation programme organized for the postulants on resumption to the Novitiate which includes interculturality, to enable them live in harmony and understanding of one another.

The prayers and liturgies in the Novitiate are enriched with songs, hymns and liturgical rituals from different cultures.

At celebrations such as birthdays, Ghana and Nigeria independent days, Christmas, e.t.c. the novices have different cultural displays: songs, dramas, dances, preparation of different dishes and so on.

The novices attend French classes at the SMA Formation House and days are mapped out in the week when community prayers are said in French and only French Language is spoken by everyone on such days.

During 'August Programme', (a month programme organized for novices preparing to make their first vows shortly before profession) there's a workshop on interculturality alongside Mission and Missiology.

All these activities help to enhance interpersonal and intercultural relationships. It opens those to be professed up for mission and intercultural community living. It also helps sisters on mission to settle down more easily and be able to live out the Gospel of Christ where they are sent.

CONCLUSION

Interculturalism, the interaction between cultures, exchange and communication where the individual recognizes and accepts the reciprocity of the other's culture . is becoming increasingly important in our world growing into a global village; our world, torn apart by selfishness, greed, hatred, unforgiveness, unhealthy nationalism and all kinds of cultural differences.

We as Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, called from the outset from different cultural backgrounds and from different worlds, are to be committed to interculturality now than ever before.

That our communities, Districts, Regions, Provinces, be places where individual sisters and persons which her cultural differences is accepted and cherished for her uniqueness and contribute her riches for the common good.

So that our world would be a community, that community which Christ yearned and prayed for. A community that is a '**salad bowl**' not a '**melting pot**'; a community where every individual and culture is recognised and respected as unique, not where individuals and cultures are crushed losing their identity; a community where every human person and culture would give out their distinct taste, not where their taste would be totally lost.

God, from the beginning called us to be one people, the people of God, His children. Jesus our Lord and Master prayed that we may be one. May that unity which He prayed for, be a reality in our communities, our Provinces, our Districts, our Church, and in our world.

May our Lady, under whose mantle the Apostles gathered and were given impetus to carry out the Will of God, pray for us. Amen.