

# Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ P H J C

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To all the friends of our mission in Nigeria



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Dear friends and benefactors,

Good things can be shared this time, from Nigeria as well as from our whole congregation. After the truly beautiful celebrations on the event of the canonization of our foundress, St. Katharina of Dernbach as the pope officially called her, we returned to our every day life like on angels' wings. This every day life comprised the 25th General Chapter of our congregation during April and May of this year – that means the meeting of elected delegates from all the areas of our congregation, in order to discuss and decide on questions of our future, listening to and accepting reports and the election of international leadership – for this chapter for the first time in history, over 50 delegates came together. A new leadership team for international leadership has to be elected every six years, and this was done.



Two of the newly elected team members are especially dear to our mission in Nigeria. Sr. Annemarie Pitzl, formerly known as Sr. Petricia, is now the General Vicaress – from the end of the year 2007 she joined me in Nigeria and was very much involved in building up this mission, first of all by being novice directress until in 2014, she could pass on this important responsibility to Sr. Kelechi after she had been fully trained in Kenya. And another one of the councillors is Sr. Jacqueline Injete who came to Germany for religious

training and formation together with the first two Nigerian women in 2001. Sr. Jacqueline returned to Kenya and was involved for a number of years in leadership there, and so she also brings leadership experience to her new task. The second piece of good news is something that concerns congregational organization: since 2011, Nigeria had been a Pro-Region, the other three mission areas joining Nigeria in the following years. In the 2019

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General Chapter, it was decided that all Pro-Regions are now Regions and so they also have the right to send delegates to General Chapter according to the number of professed sisters.

In the 2019 General Chapter, Srs. Scholastica Okorie, Kelechi Ifoegbu and Perpetua Oguibe represented Nigeria in the decision making and evaluation of the present situation of our congregation. And I was very happy to see how all the sisters of our Pro-Regions shared with commitment and insight in the reflections and deliberations of the meeting. It really was especially the sisters from the new mission areas that were founded after 1970, that gave a clear shape to this chapter with their openness and willingness to accept responsibility.



But what could our Nigerian sisters tell the chapter members? They showed how the latest political elections in Nigeria did not improve the situation regarding safety and well-being of the people. The former president, Mr. Buhari, has been re-elected and just as before, Boko Haram is very active in terrorizing not only the North of the country, more and more there are also attacks in the South and in neighbouring states. So there are many refugees from the affected areas. Near Ifetedo in the South West, there is one of the refugee camps. Christians as well as Muslims from the North returned to their land of origin, in this case the Yoruba area, after having lost everything in the attacks. Our sisters try to help them to the best of their ability, following the footsteps of our foundress who saw sisters and brothers in all people, regardless of their religion or race. I have received fotos from such visits to the camp but they are so terrible that I cannot show them here. And it may be good to say here that Boko Haram does not only attack Christians – the Muslims in the North mainly follow the Sunnite tradition while the Southerners are more of the Schiite tradition, but they are also attacked, murdered and robbed. It is not religion that Boko Haram fights for, they just want to destabilize and terrorize.

There are victims of capitalism too in Nigeria. The corruption among the many rich goes on just as the lack of the most necessary things for life among the poor. Chinese firms buy land at a large scale, they built the first railway and enlarged the airport in the capital Abuja, and American firms try to run farming according to their systems, making it a kind of industry. It is like a continuation of the colonial system with economic means. All the more essential and important is the kind of help that our sisters and many people of good will try to give. Africa also feels the global climate change just like all other countries. During our chapter we learnt that a bad storm damaged the roofs of our school and the convent building in Mgbele. The damage could be repaired in the meantime, thank God.



Improvement can only come through education. The new small school in Ilon Ifobu started with 18 children, and at the end of the first term there were 27. The three secondary schools that were developed in our first primary schools in Mgbele, Azhin Kasa and Ifetedo, keep growing, the domestic school in Ibokun works very well and gives young girls and boys a chance to earn their own living after finishing their training. This is shaping their future in a good way.



The health care for the poor in rural areas also goes on, good things happen to the people both in the little hospital in Mgbele and in the mobile clinics connected to all convents. And both the projects for the widows as well as the power girls go on and bring fruit. Our sisters keep coming up with very good ideas how to help people.

The local cosmetics from the shea nut and shea butter can be sold easily in the local markets and give an income to widows. Just now Sr Emmanuela wrote to me how happy the Ifetedo widows are with the project and that they would like to spread the project to other areas so that more women can be helped.



The sandals decorated with pearls that the power girls were taught to make, also are a good source of income and the girls like this work.



In our orphanage our children keep growing. They all go to school except for the children that are too heavily handicapped mentally, and their development is promising. I already shared with you that our oldest girl, Joan, is a teacher in our school now. Only Raphael, the boy we freed from the Remand Home in June 2006 and whose development we tried to further all this time, is a real disappointment. He did not succeed in secondary school and then also left his training with a master of painting, and he started robbing people and being a real threat. He ran away and we accepted him again when he finally came back, but there was no improvement in his behaviour. In the end we had to forbid him to come into our home again. We can only try to support him with prayers and hope for God's help. On the other hand, it is a great joy that in June, there will be both first and final profession, Srs. Helen and Emelda will profess their final vows on the 17th of this month. We wish them God's choicest blessings for this great day.

I kept the best piece of news for the end. After a whole year and much work, finally Missio Aachen granted our application to train a campaign team of young women and men with some of our sisters and a lady well known in the South East, in order to go into the villages and show information material and talk to the people about how to stop genital mutilation or the so-called cutting of young girls and women. We need to educate people that this is in no way necessary to make women behave well and be faithful to their husbands, it is just a harmful and very dangerous tradition. Even the state forbids this tradition now, in the cities it is no more prevalent, but in the rural communities, it is still being done. Most men believe that only after cutting, their women will be faithful or as they say, clean. No one asks whether the men are faithful, though. For the women, even if they survive the ordeal, the effects cause pain and problems all through their lives. Our sisters succeeded in developing a program so that change is possible even in rural areas. A well to-do woman here, a former gynecologist, generously offered us quite a large sum of money, but she insisted that the project has to go through Misiso since she wants to be sure that it will go on for a long time, as long as necessary. Finally now this application has been granted, so that we hope that now, the money will finally be sent and the program can be started. As the first of the bishops, His Excellency Archbishop Anthony of Owerri has promised also to support this project – something I never succeeded in while I was in Nigeria and talked to several bishops about it. This is a great step forward since people trust the word of their priests. As I already shared with you, through the organization „German women for mission“, we had collected signatures of people supporting our project in order to present the signatures to Pope Francis so that he would also use his influence on the bishops and their priests in Nigeria. On October 17, 2018, we could present the list of signatures to the Pope in the Vatican in a public audience.



Another good piece of news at the end: through the organization called „Siblings of Africa“, a young volunteer was in our Child Care in Mgbele for three months, and she was very helpful in teaching and challenging our children. So the good influence of this group not only works in Ifetedo, the school they fully support, but beyond that too. There are so many things we are grateful for.

In the name of our sisters and in my own name, I wish all of you a very good summer and all that is good for your own lives and for your families. With my most heartfelt thanks for your faithfulness and your support, I remain with loving greetings

*S. Uwe Hen Adjc.*