

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC VOYAGE
A witness's personal account of the beginnings: 2004 – 2009

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In the early 2000s, after series of brain storming at the executive meetings of the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR), it was decided that there was the need to have a publication that would benefit the growing religious body in Nigeria. Prior to this decision, as a medium of communication, the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious was producing a newsletter through which important information was disseminated to her members. During these years, immediately after the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000, members of the Conference saw the need to graduate from the present medium of communication (newsletter) to another medium that would give room to far richer contents and that would get to a wider population. This idea was unanimously accepted. And so the thought of a journal was proposed.

It was, however, obvious that a publication of that nature would need funds. Therefore a grant proposal was written from the office of the Executive Secretary of NCWR to a funding agency. Thanks be to God, a favourable response was received from the funding agency in 2003.

After the funds arrived, and with more insights received, members thought that the publication should be more than just a mere medium for information dissemination. The journal would be an annual publication, and should sell very well in the book market. The journal was destined primarily to consecrated persons in Nigeria, Africa, and to all persons interested in Consecrated Life. Therefore, its original mission, that is, the initial aim of setting up the journal was that it should be educative, informative and formative in contents.

To begin work on the journal, an editor and members of the editorial board were appointed with the task of producing the journal. Unfortunately there were unresolved issues either among the members of the board or between the members of the board and the members of the executive of NCWR. Hence the editorial board set up could not produce any publication. Efforts to resolve the issues failed. The board was then dissolved. It was not easy appointing another editor and getting members to

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constitute another editorial board for the journal. Different names were nominated but were not appointed.

In January 2003 at the Annual Business meeting of NCWR, the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus were welcomed to serve in the Secretariat of NCWR and the National Renewal Centre (NRC) both situated in Enugu. It was during the interview session the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus had with the members of the Executive of NCWR the preceding year, that it became known that Sr. Mary Agatha Osarenkhoe - who was presented by her Institute to serve as the Executive Secretary - had done series of studies in Communications and had rich experiences in the use of the Mass Media. Therefore, after she assumed duties as Executive Secretary in March 2003, she was requested by the members of the Executive of NCWR in April during the executive meeting that same year to serve as the editor of the proposed journal. Sr. Osarenkhoe accepted the request made. This implied that she would be combining her duties as the Executive Secretary of NCWR with that of the editor of the journal, both of which were demanding responsibilities.

In September 2003 Sr. Osarenkhoe was elected by her Institute as the Vicar General. With this new assignment within her Institute, she left Enugu for Lagos in January 2004. Though the editorial office remained in Enugu at the National Secretariat of NCWR at Valley Road, Iva-Valley, Enugu, she would be operating from Lagos as the Editor.

Among the five names proposed for the journal, *The Voyage* was chosen. The first issue of the journal was produced by Sr. Osarenkhoe with the help of the assistant editor, Sr. Pricilla Aliu, SND and the then office assistant in the NCWR secretariat, Sr. Maureen Iwu, EHJ. It was printed in Enugu by Optimal International at 9 Ochuba Street off Achala Layout, Agbani. Thanks to divine providence and to the editor, Sr. Osarenkhoe, though combining the demands of two offices (the Secretary of NCWR and the editor of the journal), the Editorial Board ensured that the publication saw the light of day in January 2004.

The educating annual religious journal, *The Voyage*, was launched at the January 2004 meetings of both NCWR and the Conference of Major Superiors (Men). With this first issue, the long impasse with regard to the publication of the journal was over. It was a dream- come- true for the Conference. The Journal is the brain child of NCWR. The

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following are the sentiments of the then president of NCWR, Mother Maria Ifechukwu Udorah, DDL, writing to the editor after the first two editions:

"We wish to thank you immensely for your beautiful editorial works in the production of the journal titled 'The Voyage'. Through your hard work and wisdom you were able to fulfill our beautiful dream of producing a journal we can call our own. Our utmost joy is that the work is indeed a wonderful one with so many well researched and inspiring articles and reflections as contributions from people of good-will. The two editions, 2004 and 2005 that were produced have sold very well in the book market, and we are indeed very grateful to you."

Though the very first edition had as its publisher Nigeria Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men) gave useful suggestions at the early stage especially as to what to do to keep the journal alive. It was during one of the joint Executive Meetings that the men asked that the journal become the publication of both conferences – Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN). The request was welcomed by the NCWR. Hereafter, starting with the 2005 issue, the publication had as its publisher Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, that is, including both the women and men Religious.

The same group of people who worked with the editor to produce the first edition also worked with her to produce the 2005 edition. However, the second edition and subsequent issues were printed in Lagos by Oghene Prints Ltd., Lagos. The change of printer was necessary for proximity to the editor; his production was also judged to be of a very good quantity.

In January 2005 members of the editorial board were appointed and the official appointment of Sr. Osarenkhoe as the Editor was confirmed:

Sr. Mary Agatha Osarenkhoe, EHJ – Editor

Fr. Lawrence Okwuosa, SVD

Sr. Ifeoma Arinze, DC

The members of the board were given the deadline of ensuring that the publication was

out from the press for the Annual General meeting in January each year. The members got started. The inaugural meeting of the editorial board was held on May 14, 2005 in the convent of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Ikeja, Lagos.

THE CONCEPT OR FORMULA OF THE JOURNAL

The birth of *The Voyage* was inspired by the need to have a project that would enrich the life of Religious Men and Women in Nigeria. *The Voyage*, according to both Conferences, would perform twin functions - informing and educating. For these reasons, the journal would present to its readers well-researched contemporary and historical articles on varied themes as would be beneficial to them. Articles were written by very good Catholic writers (Priests, Religious and Lay faithful). Some contributors were commissioned to write on given topics around the theme that was decided upon for that year while others on topical subjects. For instance, one year, because many Congregations would be having their General or Provincial Chapters a writer was commissioned to write on Chapters. Many readers found that article very helpful. There were contributors who volunteered to write on interesting and relevant articles. In 2007 for example, one of the readers, Rev. Father Patrick E. Akekpe, MSP, Editor of *The Catholic Ambassador*, after reading our journal, volunteered to be a contributor. Here is an extract from his letter to the editor:

"I read and marked every article in that volume. Many of the articles were very well written, and dealt exhaustively with the topics treated. I have not read the current edition, but I have no doubts that it will surpass even previous editions. I congratulate you for the work you are doing on behalf of the Nigerian Church under the umbrella of the Conference of Major Superiors. Let me know how I can make a contribution to your next edition, and what your guidelines are."

FORMAT

The very first issue came out in A5 size with a glossy sky-blue cover. This size was handy. Subsequent editions were in the same format but with a different colour for the cover each year. Contributing writers were asked to place notes, if any, at the end of their article.

CHANGE OF NAME

The first three editions of the journal had the name, *The Voyage*. This name was, however, changed starting with the 2007 edition because it was discovered on November 27, 2006 when an application was submitted to the library in Enugu to have the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) that the name *The Voyage* already existed. The Conference was advised to change the name of the journal. 'Catholic' was then added to make the difference. Hence the new name, 'The Catholic Voyage.' The journal received the ISSN on December 21, 2006.

CONTENTS AND EDITORIAL POLICY

From its beginning, *The Catholic Voyage* was a wide range collection of articles and reflections on contemporary issues. Among the subjects matter published in the journal were Religion, Religious life, education, psychology, communication, socio-economy, Spirituality, Canon Law, and Health. There were also pages dedicated to book review. The CMSN also sent papers presented at their conferences, meetings, seminars/workshops for publication.

The editorial policy of *The Catholic Voyage* maintains that the journal should be an academic journal, offering well researched papers, and should have notes and bibliography. The members of the editorial board had terms of reference. They are to meet twice a year or as the need arises; seek for articles and edit them; work in close collaboration with the Editor; and suggest means of (sustainable) marketing and distribution.

READERSHIP, FREQUENCY AND CIRCULATION FIGURES

The targeted readers of the journal were primarily the consecrated persons (women and men), priests and candidates in houses of religious formation, as well as all lay persons interested in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life as well as some laity. Some readers gave feedbacks with beautiful and encouraging comments, and also made useful suggestions. *The Catholic Voyage* was published once a year. One thousand copies were printed for each edition.

SALES AND DISTRIBUTION

The very first issue of the journal was presented and launched at the January 2004 annual business meeting of CMSN. The birth of the journal was well received by all. The presenter of the publication borrowed words from the Editorial of the maiden edition. She started thus: "There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven. A time for giving birth" 'A time for the journal to be born,' she added. And almost every member present bought copies of the journal. Each year the new edition of the publication was presented at the January meeting to be launched. After the meeting, NCWR secretariat would serve as the outlet for sales and distribution to Area Conferences and other readers. The price of a copy was affordable by members.

COMPLIMENTARY COPIES

Every year complimentary copies were given to the Apostolic Nunciature, Bishops, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Seminaries, and some major Catholic Institutions. Letters of appreciation and compliments in terms of content and quality of the production were received from some of these beneficiaries. The state library in Enugu highly commended the journal for contents and quality of production.

THE EDITOR REASSIGNED

In December 2008, the editor, Sr. Osarenkhoe, wrote to the president of NCWR, Rev. Mother Pauline Eboh, DMMM asking to be relieved of her appointment as editor of *The Catholic Voyage* because of the many other commitments both within and outside her Congregation that were competing for her attention and time making it difficult to dedicate enough time to the journal. And so after the 2009 edition a new editor was appointed to replace her.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT

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We cannot dismiss the need for a journal as *The Catholic Voyage* today. As a print medium, I never see *The Catholic Voyage* as one of those print materials out there serving as mere information dissemination. Through this journal we can inform, educate and form its readers. There is no gain listing its many benefits. Thank God that despite the challenge of lack of enough patronage facing the journal over the years it has not gone into extinction. If we want the journal to continue to exist and grow, we must patronize it and further publicize it. I encourage members of our two Conferences to invest on *The Catholic Voyage*. It promotes the mission of Consecrated Life in church and society. It is a very good venture - a venture which is non-profit making. It is necessary enterprise - where we all stakeholders. It is a laudable initiative. Today more than ever before, we need such journal as *The Catholic Voyage* to serve especially the clergy, the consecrated persons, and the candidates in Houses of Formation and seminaries, and also the lay faithful who desire to have a deepened knowledge of or share in the spirituality, charism or apostolic mission of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life who compose our two Conferences.