



Bishop Welcomes Four New Priests to the Diocese

During the recent annual Convocation for the Priests of the Diocese, Bishop Edward Braxton introduced four new *fidei donum* missionary priests he had recently invited to serve the Catholic people of southern Illinois. It was appropriate that the new shepherds of the people of God were introduced during a Convocation which focused upon *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (I will give you pastors), Blessed John Paul II's landmark Apostolic Exhortation on the formation of seminarians and priests. The priests warmly welcomed their new coworkers in parish ministry. The Bishop reminded them that it is always challenging to begin ministry anew in a strange place. He urged them to "reach out to their brothers, invite them to join their support groups, ask them out to dinner or to a sporting event, learn from them as they will learn from you."

The four new priests are:



Fr. Augustine Ibezimako



Fr. Christopher Anyanwu



Fr. John Kizhakedan



Fr. Peter Balili

The Reverend Christopher O. Anyanwu was ordained a priest by the Most Reverend V.A. Chikwe on August 5, 1995 for the Diocese of Ahiara Mbaise, Nigeria. He prepared for the priesthood, studying philosophy and theology, at Saints Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija Ibadan.

He served in a variety of pastoral appointments before being assigned as Pastor of St. Anthony Parish in Umunama. Four years later the Bishop transferred him to Holy Ghost Parish in Uvuru, where he also stayed for four years, serving as a Pastor. In this appointment he was in charge of Sancta Maria primary and secondary schools. Four years later he was appointed to St.

Charles Borromeo Parish in Ogbor where he served until his Bishop released him to serve as a *fidei donum* missionary priest in the Diocese of Belleville.

Father Anyanwu has also served as Chaplain of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Society and the Blue Army of Our Lady Society. At the same time, he coordinated the work of the Catholic Men's Organization.

He is currently residing at the Bishop's Residence along with Father Ibezimako. Like all *fidei donum* priests, he will remain there for a period of two to three months. During this time he will meet regularly with the Bishop while Father Von Deeke, the Bishop's Liaison for International Priests, introduces him to all aspects of the life of the Diocese. He recently participated in the Priests' Convocation where he had the opportunity to meet most of the priests of the Diocese.

The Reverend Peter Balili, a native of Tupi, South Cotabato, in the Diocese of Tagbilaran in the Phillipines, was ordained on March 21, 1989. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from Notre Dame University of Marbel. He earned his Bachelor's in Theology studying with the Dominican Fathers in Manila. Later, he earned a Doctorate in Theology at the University of Navarra, Spain, under the auspices of the Opus Dei Fathers. He stayed in Navarra for three years where he developed a fluency in Spanish.

In 1999, he went to California to study Clinical Pastoral Education and completed the program at St. Joseph Medical Center in Orange. During his six years of studies, he did parish ministry in the Diocese of San Bernardino and the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

In a letter to Bishop Braxton, he wrote a summery of his view of the Christian life. "In Moral Theology I learned that the goal of human life is to be united and in eternal fellowship with God. This goal, achieved after death, is a gift from God given to those who have experienced salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ while living on earth. This final goal has implications in my present life on earth. It is necessary for me to order my life towards the right things, such as charity, peace, responsibility, and holiness in order for me to gain eternal fellowship with God in heaven. I believe that real happiness can only be found and be built in God. Without prayers to God, everything falls apart."

The Bishop has assigned Father Balili as Administrator of St. Mary Parish in Sesser and St. Andrew Parish in Christopher.

The Reverend Augustine Ibezimako was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Ahiara Mbaise, Nigeria on July 20, 1995. His father, Godfrey, an excellent farmer, assisted the parish priest in taking care of farm produce because their home was close to the Church. He began to stay at the rectory while his older brothers and sisters went to school. He believes that his love for the house of God and priesthood resulted from that early exposure to the rectory. When the teacher asked him what he intended to become in the future, he always answered, "a Reverend Father."

Later, he studied philosophy at the Senior Seminary and earned a Bachelor of Philosophy degree. His theological formation was at St. Joseph's Major Seminary, affiliated with the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, where he earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree.

After serving in several parish assignments, his Bishop sent him to Porto-Novo in Benin Republic – West Africa to study an agricultural development project in order to replicate it in his diocese. This experience led him to author the book, Songhai Integrated Bio-Agricultural Techniques: An Overview. In 2007, he was appointed parish priest at St. Jude's Parish in Amuzi, where he served until his late Bishop released him for service as a *fidei donum* missionary in Belleville.

He is currently residing at the Bishop's Residence along with Father Anyanwu. He will remain there for a period of two to three months. During this time he will meet regularly with the Bishop while Father Deeke, the Bishop's Liaison for International Priests, assists him in learning about American culture and instructs him concerning liturgical life and pastoral activities in the Diocese. He recently traveled with the Bishop to the fall Farm Blessing at Sassafras Acres, the Bierbaum family farm in Olmsted. The nearly three hour drive made him aware of the far-flung nature of the Diocese.

The Reverend John Kizhakedan, a Carmelite of Mary Immaculate (CMI), was ordained on December 27, 1974. He received his theological education at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Father brings an extensive background in counseling to the Diocese. He earned a M.Ed. degree in Counseling from DePaul University in 1962, an M.A. in Sociology from Karnatak University, India in 1972, and a M.A.C. (Master Addictions Counselor) in 1996.

After his ordination, Father Kizhakedan was Associate Pastor and Lecturer in Sociology at Sacred Heart College, Cochin, India until 1979. While studying at DePaul University, he did parish ministry at Presentation Parish in the Archdiocese of Chicago. He also serves as chaplain at Cabrini Hospital and St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital. From 1984 until this year, he has been extensively involved in counseling and in prison ministry in the Diocese of Joliet.

Bishop Braxton has appointed him to Prison Ministry in the Diocese and as Sacramental Minister at St. Patrick Parish in Tipton. He resides at St. Pius V Parish in Walsh.