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DIVINE FACE ORGANIZATION

(Concern for the needy)

Newsletter - September 8, 2003

Dear Friend of the Divine Face,

May the God and Father of the poor and the needy be ever glorified by our service of love to them! In their name I greet you with the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The period since my last visit to the U.S. has been one year of events, anxiety, progress, challenges and yet thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING

I start with thanksgiving because I believe that in all things we should thank God as long as we are alive. First of all, I thank God that as soon as I got home last year, we had in our country the third national Eucharistic Congress. It was my privilege to have been chosen as the chairman of the committee that organized the celebration in our diocese, and led our diocesan contingent to the national celebration in Ibadan, an ancient city in the western part of Nigeria. As the high point of the celebration, we had the first national Pastoral Congress at which our bishop also had me represent the priests of our diocese. From then on it was one assignment after the other till the end of July '03.

Thanks to God, I arrived here safely in the first hours of Thursday, August 14, just some hours before the *blackout!* We all still have fresh in our minds events of a general nature that have taken place since last year. Some of them are international, affecting the civil society. Others are national, affecting our various nations. Still others have affected the Church. Yet, some other events have been of a particular nature, affecting our families or individual selves. Of all these, some have been pleasant. For these we give glory to our heavenly Father. Others have not been pleasant or may have even caused us sorrow. I hereby empathize with those who may have had sad events during this time, and pray that the Father of all consolations may bless them through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, Comforter of the afflicted.

I am particularly thankful to God for everyone of you good and generous people of God, brothers and sisters of the needy in Nigeria. I thank you for the eloquent testimony you are giving to our Christian faith by embracing as your brothers and sisters people you have never seen, and being so unwavering in your resolve to help.

ANXIETY

This desire to help has almost become synonymous with the United States. Consequently, many sons and daughters of this country are in various nations fighting to help ensure freedom for the oppressed. If any of you have members of your family involved in such operations, you must be anxious about them. I join you in praying for their safety wherever they are.

The political situation in my home country, Nigeria, puts most of the citizens in a condition of people under siege. The saddest thing about it is that we are supposed to have a democratic government which in effect is worse than a dictatorship. I am sure that if you were to look at my former letters you will find that this has constantly been the picture I have painted of the situation of that country. So, one may wonder if I am not a pessimist. It makes me feel ashamed to talk about it.

I don't mean to sound discouraging. I just wish to share with you my anxiety over the plight of a people that seems to be condemned to constant disillusionment. For four years we had a system of government that cared very, very little for the welfare of the citizens. We all hoped and worked hard for a change to come from the general elections held in April this year. To our utter and greatest disgust and disappointment, those in power brazenly manipulated the election results in their favor and are back to their game. How disheartening! Since then, things have gotten worse for the common people. Money is very hard to come by. When it is gotten, it has very little value and purchasing power. For example, unemployment is at its peak, with thousands graduating from college and other institutions every year. The minimum salary for the employed is the equivalent of about \$54.00 (fifty-four dollars) a month. More often than not, this salary is paid two months late. Yet kerosene, which is most commonly used for cooking and for lanterns, in a country that hardly has electricity, costs as much as \$6.00 (six dollars) a gallon. Gasoline, when it is available, depending where you are in the country, costs as much, sometimes more. I enclose here some newspaper articles to help give some idea of what the situation is like. This spells nothing other than more hardship and suffering for the very poor people who are our concern in our ministry (yours and mine). Remember, your contribution of even \$15.00 or \$20.00 a month helps a family of four stay alive with hope.

PROGRESS

Every dark cloud has some silver lining. So it is that in spite of the palpable difficulty of life in the country, and precisely in the midst of biting hardship, God our Father and our Blessed Mother have been with us. With your help we were able to reach out to more people than our regular beneficiaries. Some indigent students were able to get some support to keep them going. Some more families whose financial backbones had cracked have been adopted. The widow's hut I talked about in my last letter has been replaced with a solid house of two rooms for her and her son. Unfortunately, there was some riot in the village where they live. So it was not possible to get a picture of the house before I came out. Also, some significant progress has been made in the school.

We were able to complete the block work on the first floor of the storied building. For

lack of space where to keep the students, we converted two classrooms upstairs into dorms for the boys. You will remember that we run our secondary school entirely as a boarding school. We intend that the top floor of this building, when built, will be the dormitory for the boys.

This year, too, we were able to qualify for the accreditation of our secondary school by the government at the Junior Secondary level. That took a lot, believe me! Thanks to the good books that many of you donated last year, our library was rated the best in our state. We shall start the Senior Secondary level when school reopens on September 29, this year. For the accreditation at this level, much more is required. Part of the requirement is teachers. Up until now we had to use the services of some part-time teachers and some on national youth service. But now, we have to have permanent teachers. So, we have hired a new and resident principal with a sense of mission and eight *new teachers* to add to the six we had before. Of course, to be able to keep them, we have to pay them relatively well, since they are all college graduates, even though our pay cannot match what they would get if they were to be employed by the government. But, the government is not hiring! \$75.00 (seventy-five dollars) a month will encourage one teacher to work for us.

To make sure that these teachers are available to render optimal service, we have had to put up a building to house them. It is not possible to rent any room or house for them in the village where the school is located. So, we started the house in July of this year, hoping that by some miracle, it will be ready for the teachers by the end of September. Since this is a priority, we have to cut down on the number of new students for the next academic year starting in September.



CHALLENGES

Dear coworker in the vineyard of the Lord and co-care-provider for the Lord's little ones, I guess that many of you know better than I do that the development of any child is a joy and a challenge at the same time to the parents. Sometimes I tell myself that if I had known the involvement of this school project I most probably would not have gone in for

it. As the students increase (we had 106 this year), so the responsibilities on our part increase. Up until now, they have been fetching water from a nearby spring water outlet to supplement the underground reservoir of *rainwater* that we have. This outlet serves also the villagers. Sometimes the students have to wait long before they are able to get water, and some of the youth from the village can be rough too. Only one person gets water from the outlet at a time. Consequently, we thought of sinking a well in the school premises for the students.

After spending the equivalent of \$3000.00 (three thousand dollars) on the well project, the contractor said he hit a large deposit of clay and could not continue, since he was using a manually driven machine. We contacted another contractor who said it would cost the equivalent of about \$9,400.00 (nine thousand, four hundred dollars) to sink the well using a motor-driven machine. The need for this well is ~ rather urgent now, not only because of the student population, but also because soon it will be the dry season back home. Think also of the situation where the underground reservoir supplies water for the construction works that we do at the school as well.

Just to foresee the question some of you may have about the school bus, I have no good news concerning that bus. Between the unavailability of genuine repair parts and mechanics that are not honest, we have suffered a lot of stress and distress over the bus for no use. A mechanic bought a motor for the bus last year, but it turned out that it was not a good one. So, right now, we have no school bus. And that is adversely - affecting, especially, our nursery and primary schools. We are down from 460 pupils to 247. Drastic, isn't it? *But we are hopeful, and our hope will not deceive us!*

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The grounded school bus **in** front of the school block

CONCLUSION

Looking at our checklist of special needs as of last year, we have accomplished much, even certain things that we could not foresee. Thanks be to God! However, the following require urgent attention in this order:

1. The sinking of a well for the students ~ ~
2. The completion of the teachers' house
3. The completion of the dormitory
4. A dining hall for the students
5. Transportation for the school children

May the almighty Provider bless you and your families as you continue to be for the

poorest of the poor a living evidence of His caring love. I am in the U.S. until October 5, 2003. You will be getting an invitation to an "Open House" being arranged by the members of our organization sometime this month. Please endeavor to come so that we can see each other and have some cordial interaction. See you then! But in case you cannot come and wish to contact me, feel free to call me at (817) xxx-xxxx, or by mail, 5808 Coldsworth Ct., Arlington, TX 76018.

Please find enclosed an advert for a catholic phone company that offers you the opportunity to pay less and yet with your phone bill, further support our mission for the greater glory of God and your eternal happiness.

Sincerely yours as always in His Image,

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Rev. Fr. Akannamdi Gerard Mary Anyanwu (Chief Steward).