PRESENTATION

THE TRIPLET HOSTELS

Ever since her inception, Seat of Wisdom Seminary has been blessed with generous financial and material support from Rome (thanks to the Sisters of St. Peter Claver) and Germany (thanks to Frederick Cardinal Wetter, the Archbishop of Munich and Freizing). The names of the three hostel buildings were chosen to reflect the grateful sentiments which the institution relays to her most cherished benefactors and benefactresses who supplied the finances for the earliest buildings. It is said, in recent times, that Seat of Wisdom Seminary stands tall as a citadel of learning. This is but the testimony of the generosity of her earliest and foundational benefactors; a testimony borne by the monuments of architectural expertise of the Italian firms Mitchelletti and Ponti bestowing the long-lasting beauty which greets the eyes as one looks around the Seat of Wisdom Seminary compound. Strikingly, “Cardinal Wetter” is a household name in Wisdom family. A stranger may suppose that this is because of the centrality of the hostel building in that triplet architectural masterpiece, which bears the name “WETTER”. Yet there is more of some historical imprint than mere structural undertones to this. A concise presentation of the historical significance of the names “MAYER”, “WETTER”, and “TOMKO” designating the triplet hostel buildings is quite informative: Divine Providence has it that in 1987, at the beatification mass celebrated in Munich, Germany for Fr. Rupert Mayer (a Jesuit who lived and worked in Bavaria; a strong opponent of Adolf Hitler during the second World War) and at another beatification mass celebrated in Cologne, Germany for Edith Stein (a Jew by birth who eventually became a Carmelite nun; an erudite philosopher who was arrested, incarcerated and executed during the Second World War) – both of who were exemplary religious in Germany - a huge collection totaling about one million German Marks was made. The Cardinal Prefect of Propagation Fide (namely Joseph Cardinal Tomko who had earlier visited the seminary at the temporary site the previous year i.e. 1986) being in company of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, told him that the money could be best utilized at “Owerri in Nigeria where a Major Seminary is being erected”. This was the miracle of Providential financing of the seminary project through the instrumentality of Cardinal Tomko under the graceful aegis of Blessed Fr. Mayer’s beatification, which took place in that ecclesiastical territory titled “The Archdiocese of Munich and Freizing” shepherded by Cardinal Wetter as the Metropolitan See. Notably, the first Administrative Deans for these hostels were Rev. Frs. Mark Njoku, Martin Elekwachi, and Victor Ifeanyi.

SPIRITUAL LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

The Wisdom family blossoms in spiritual activities, thanks to the tradition of silence which imbues her various chapels with a devotional setting. The Main Chapel is her beacon of unity whereupon the entirety of the noble Wisdom family assembles for community prayers and worship, particularly on Special Feasts, Solemnities, Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays, Solemn Vespers, and the Weekday Sexts (Midday Prayers during the week). Portable chapels (which were all simultaneously consecrated on Monday January 15th 1990) are also adjoining each of the three Hostels wherein Weekday masses, Weekday Lauds (Morning Prayers during the week), Weekend Sexts (Afternoon Prayers over the weekend), Weekday Vespers (Evening Prayers during the week), and Complines (Night Prayers) are celebrated. Weekday masses in the three hostel chapels are simultaneously celebrated and presided by different priests on the staff according to a weekly Roster schedule. The historical roots of the idea of different hostel chapels decentralizing as it were, certain spiritual activities date back to the practice and regulation adopted at the temporary site which gave rise to celebrating different masses for the First Year Seminarians (who combined the Spiritual Year Programme with First Year Philosophical studies) on the one hand and different masses on the other hand for the older seminarians. However, in the present permanent site, every class of the
seminarians is spread in the three hostels such that each hostel houses a mixture of seminarians in both the philosophy and theology departments, who together celebrate masses and spiritual exercises commonly at the respective hostel chapels. There is also another chapel built for the members of the non-tutorial staff. This chapel is usually put in use on Sundays since the Sunday masses at the Main Chapel may be essentially tailored in such a way that the Homilies may not be of much benefit to non-seminarians. Outside this arrangement is also the “House System” by which seminarians are grouped into different houses of not more than forty members. The houses gather for Eucharistic celebrations on Tuesday evenings at different places of meeting in the Seminary compound to worship together as different small Christian community of seminarians. In addition to the normal day-to-day spiritual activities we have Spiritual Conferences on Thursdays, Auto-Formation (similar to a Desert experience) on Mondays, Weekly Confessions, Monthly Recollections on First Sundays of the month, and Spiritual Directions at the discretion of the seminarians, and Retreats at the beginning as well as end of every Academic and Formation Year. Seat of Wisdom is also blessed with the animating services of such Pious Sodalities as Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Jude, St. Anthony, St.Theresa of the Child Jesus, St. Vincent De Paul, Legion of Mary, Pioneer Total Abstinence, Blue army, Divine Mercy as well as Movements like Blessed Tansi Solidarity, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Catholic Biblical Instructors Union, and Slaves of Love.

INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITIES

Academically, Seat of Wisdom Seminary has soared high in both qualitative output and qualificatory standards. The first set of pioneer seminarians who sat for Bachelor’s Degree examinations in Philosophy (B.Phil) did so in June (5th to 23rd), 1989 at the Temporary site under the aegis of St. Joseph’s Major seminary Ikot-Ekpene - an affiliate of Pontifical Urban University, Rome. However, on the 8th day of March, 1991 the jubilant news was broken to the seminarians that the seminary herself has completed the affiliation processes of her Philosophy Department to the Pontifical Urban University Rome, which affiliation course had been underway since the year 1989. This news was celebrated with a Holy Mass presided over by the messenger (His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Dr. M.O.Unegbu, the then bishop of Owerri Diocese) who formally read the affiliation letter to the staff and seminarians, subsequent upon which he handed the Affiliation Letter to the Rector, Very Rev. Fr. Dr. T. I. Okere. Sequel to this landmark, the second set of B.Phil candidates of Seat of Wisdom Seminary sat for their first degree examinations in Philosophy under the academic tutelage of Pontifica Universitas Urbaniana. The bourgeoning Theology Department was to take its turn in the affiliation exercise to the Urban University Rome, in 1993. In line with the Universal Church’s concept of adapting to the local needs and culture, the seminary needed to be affiliated to a local university. That is why Seat of Wisdom Seminary got affiliated to the Imo State University, Owerri – Nigeria in the two departments of Philosophy and Religious Studies in 1998. The first group of seminarian-affiliates (student-affiliates) to Imo State University had their Matriculation on the 22nd day of November 1999. They have since obtained their first Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) degrees in their respective disciplines of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Furthermore, this seminary has continually hosted numerous academic seminars, conferences, and colloquia so many of which had borne fruits locally and internationally. For instance, on the 13th day of November, 2003, a provincial assembly of the clergy and the laity rubbed minds together in a timely seminar on the theme “The Challenges Of Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria” which addressed the phenomenal abuse of liturgical activities in and around Owerri Ecclesiastical Province due to the menaces of Pentecostalism and Syncretism prevalent in the area. This seminar drew together all the proprietors of this institution namely the six bishops of the dioceses in the Province (Archbishop Anthony J. V. Obinna of Owerri, Bishop Gregory Ochiagha of Orlu, Bishop Anthony Ilonu of Okigwe, Bishop Victor Chikwe of Alhiaara, Bishop Lucius Ugorji of Umuahia, and Bishop V. Ezeonyia of Aba). In attendance also were over six hundred priests, four hundred religious, about a thousand lay members of Christ’s faithful. Also from 22nd to 24th March 2006 the wisdom Family
engaged her academia in an International Philosophical Conference on the theme: *Crises in Africa at the Beginning of this Millennium: The Response of Philosophy, Science and Religion*. The conference fielded such intellectual heavyweights as Most Rev. Dr. A.J.V. Obinna (Archbishop of Owerri, Nigeria), Msgr. Theophilus Okere (Whelan Research Institute, Owerri, Nigeria), Prof. Kelbesser Workineh (University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), Ass. Prof. R.C. Onwuanibe (Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri, Nigeria), Prof. B.O. Eboh (University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria), Prof. F. U. Okafor (University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria) etc.

Interesting also is the profuse vigour at which serious academic publications issue out of the Seat of Wisdom Intellectual cornucopia. Worthy of mention are such periodicals as Oche-Amamhihe Journal of Philosophy and Theology (the official journal of the Seminary), The Wisdom Satellite Magazine, The Pointer Magazine (of the Philosophy Department), The New Pentecost (of the Charismatic Renewal Society in the seminary), The Divine Heart Magazine (of the Sacred Heart Society in the seminary), The *Obaokwu* Magazine (published in Igbo vernacular), The Witness Journal (of the C.B.I.U. Society in the seminary), The Biennial Calendar of Liturgical and Doctrinal Insight (of St. Jude’s society in the seminary), Pro-Life Newsletter (of the Pro-Life Group in the seminary).

**CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

On the cultural plain, Seat of Wisdom seminary is copiously resourceful as well. There exist in the seminary various cultural activities and groups flourishing in an atmosphere of creativity and appreciable diffusion of graceful values. Some of these groups flavour the weekly social events which offer avenues for recreations and entertainments. These cultural groups also feature at the gala nights, end of the year parties, and receptions of new members of the Wisdom family. Wisdom is replete with a mélange of cultural expressions thanks to the various diocesan cultural outfits such as: Abigbo Dance Group of Ahiara, Egwuoma Ala Owere of Owerri, Okonko Dance Group of Okigwe, Igba Ndi Eze Dance Group of Orlu, Bende War Dance of Umuahia, Ikot-ekpene Dance Group. To be found also are such entertainment groups as The Wisdom Choir (which made her recording outing on the airwaves of Imo Broadcasting Corporation Radio and Television Owerri on Wednesday 14th day of December, 1988 thanks to the outstanding efforts of Rev. Fr. J.C. Iwe and Rev. Fr. M. Njoku who ensured that this dream of the music-loving pioneer Rector- Rev. Fr. T. I. Okere- was realised), the Wisdom Theatre Group, and The Wisdom Band. We are grateful to God for the gifts of these various cultural and recreational groups. The Seminary also participates actively at the All Nigerian Major Seminaries Festival of Acts and Culture.

**SPORTING ACTIVITIES**

Seat of Wisdom Seminary believes so much in the adage that exhorts the principle of “Mens sana in Corpore Sano” (Healthy mind in a healthy body) hence she gives much attention to the growth and development of physical or bodily fitness especially in sports. Since her inception, Seat of Wisdom has identified herself creditably in sporting competitions. Apart from the internal Inter-Hostel Sports Competitions, she has been a regular participant in the All Nigeria Major Seminaries Games, making her first debut in the year 1987 when the Games was hosted by Bigard Memorial Seminary, Ikot-Ekpene (now St. Joseph’s Major Seminary, Ikot-Ekpene). In 1992 between the 24th day of February and the 1st day of March, history was festooned with a spectacular event as Seat of Wisdom hosted for the first time the 13th edition of All Nigeria Major Seminary Games Fiesta tagged “WISDOM 92”. The Seminaries in Nigeria competed for ten games and sporting events viz; football, table tennis, lawn tennis, basketball, volleyball, athletics (track events which included 100meters, 200meters, 400meters, 4 x 100 meters relay, and 1,500 meters). The participating contingents were all from Catholic Seminaries in Nigeria including:

1. Ss. Peter and Paul Bodija-Ibadan.
2. Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu.
3. St. Augustine’s Seminary, Jos.
6. Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu.
7. Claretian Institute of Philosophy, Nekede.
8. Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri.
9. Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu.
10. St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Markurdi.

WISDOM 92 could be said to have taken place when the young seminary was still lacking in facilities, yet it was a huge success, thanks to the committed efforts of the Games Organising Committee headed by Rev. Fr. Ephraim Umoren. More fabulous was the 17th edition of the All Nigeria Major Seminary Games Fiesta, which spotlighted Seat of Wisdom for the second time as a dependable host for the Games. This was ten years later, hence the tag “WISDOM 2002”. Once again Wisdom flung her main gate wide open to welcome seminarians and sports lovers from all over Nigeria. Thus between February 24th and March 2nd, 2002 the Sports history of our seminary re-echoed an orchestrated highpoint as Wisdom played host to thirteen other Nigerian seminaries including:
1. Ss. Peter and Paul Bodija-Ibadan.
2. Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu.
3. St. Augustine’s Seminary, Jos.
6. Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu.
7. Claretian Institute of Philosophy, Maryland-Nekede.
8. Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri.
9. Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu.
10. Pope John Paul Seminary, Bigard Awka Campus.
11. All Saints’ Major Seminary, Uhiele Ekpoma, Edo State.
13. Dominican Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Ibadan

At WISDOM 2002 in which such games as football, table tennis (singles and doubles), lawn tennis (singles and doubles), volleyball, badminton (singles and doubles), basketball, and athletics (100 meters, 200 meters, 400 meters, 4 x 100 metres, and 1, 500 meters) were competed for, one noted the resounding commendation which attendants accorded the Games Organising Committee headed by Rev. Fr. Dr. Evaristus Egwuatu Ekeke. One of the most entertaining encounters was recorded in the game of soccer when at the finals the Wisdom Football team won the Gold medal in football.

Four years later, at the All Nigeria Major Seminaries Games held at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Markurdi, the Wisdom Football team once more proved her mettle and retained the Gold trophy as the defending champion in the soccer. Hence “Makurdi 2006” was another testimony of the sports proficiency and the competitive stamina of the Wisdom family. In all, our seminary won three Gold medals and one silver medal during the “Makurdi 2006” games competition.

AT THE FRUITION GAUGE

One notes that in 1993, this seminary witnessed the ordination of her first set of priests. A retrospect flashes with relish that blessed Saturday, the 12th of December 1992 when the first ordination into
the clerical state of her pioneer Deacons took place in the Seat of Wisdom Seminary Main Chapel. These were the first fruits of her labour. Seven years back in 1985 at her sojourning ground – 160 Wetheral Road, Owerri, Mother Wisdom opened her bosom to welcome the first set of pioneer seminarians. Thus, at the completion of a full cycle of the seminary formative process, she was jubilant to witness that maiden graduation, nay, ordination of her first born sons into the Diaconate.

The Ordaining Prelate was the then bishop of Owerri Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mark O. Unegbu. The Acting Rector was Rev. Fr. Dr. Clement Ginikanwa Obielu (who later succeeded the first Rector Rev. Fr. Dr. T. I. Okere who was on sabbatical leave at the time after the completion of his stewardship as Rector Between 1984-1992). The total number of Deacons ordained at that auspicious ceremony were forty-five springing from the various Dioceses of Aba(three), Ahiara(five), Awka(seven), Enugu(two), Nsukka(one), Okigwe(four), Onitsha(eleven), Orlu(four), Owerri(five), Umuahia(three), and Uyo(one). As Ikot-Ekpene and Abakaliki Dioceses had already scheduled to ordain their first Wisdomite set of clerics in their home dioceses, their own candidates were not included for ordinations in the Seminary Main Chapel. It was a cause of great joy when, in 1993, Seat of Wisdom gave birth to her first set of priests. This was a feat of no mean significance as it marked the beginning of a continuous fruition of the concerted efforts of the pioneer team of formators whose “tears, sweat, and blood” laid the solid foundations on which Wisdom Family majestically stands to take her current stock of over five hundred catholic priests, a few thousands of polished citizens and convinced Christians, a current population of about five hundred and fifty seminarians and most spectacularly a daughter Philosophy Campus at Umuahia-Nigeria.

On 27th February, 2006, the Umuahia Philosophy Campus of our seminary eventually took off. Eighty seminarians from the dioceses that make up Owerri Ecclesiastical province as well as two seminarians of the Congregation of Christ the Emmanuel were drawn from the Owerri Campus to be the pioneers of the new campus of Seat of Wisdom Seminary at Ariam Umuahia in Abia State, Nigeria. The Acting Rector of the new campus is Rev. Fr. Dr. Eugene Azorji.

OUR SEMINARY AT A GLANCE: DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

Our seminary, as is often said, stands tall as a citadel of learning, the best (so to speak) house of clerical formation in West Africa. This is but the testimony that is expressed by the numerality of the monuments of architectural expertise, beauty, elegance and magnificence that greets the eye as one looks around our seminary compound.

On entering our seminary, one comes through the big seminary main gate, which leaves the visitor not without a message. The dual gate structure for entrance and exit has above it a wonderful architectural design (a boat-like structure). Thus Mother Wisdom is like a boat that carries all her students through the wide sea of wisdom and spiritual/human formation. Spanning over many acres of land, there is a very beautiful road network linking all the major structures in the seminary. The seminary Main Chapel is another structure that greets the eye. It is almost like a cathedral with a four-winged architectural design with a dome-like matrix-designed roof that sends awe-inspiring messages through her visitors. The almost 1300 sitting capacity of the chapel and its gallery so wide that the Vatican choir can comfortable be contained in it give some sense of elegance to the chapel. This chapel serves as the centre of the seminary’s spiritual life and a beacon of unity since it houses the entire seminary populace every time there is need for a common liturgical celebration: Sundays, Solemnities, Special Feast days, Solemn Vespers, and weekday sexts.

Looking towards the west front off the seminary main chapel is the living areas of the seminary compound. There is the big games village, wherein is contained all worthwhile sporting facilities that help the seminarians keep fit. These include the ultra modern standard football pitch (three of such) circled round with standard tracks for track events; the basketball court, volleyball court,
handball court, the lawn tennis court, etc. Our gigantic refectory complex is another captivating site. To the east of the complex is our standard clinic, which serves the health purposes of not just our seminarians but of the villagers living around the seminary environs.

Further are the seminary three main hostels where the seminarians live, dedicated to the three characteristic European figures that played great financial and otherwise roles for the fruition of our seminary today: Blessed Rupert Mayer, Cardinal Wetter and Cardinal Tomko. They are simply admirable. They are one-storey buildings with a 70 rooms –structure. Each hostel has its own students’ lounge, visitors’ rooms and students’ council offices. These house not just the students but their administrative deans who live with the seminarians and as such offer the best formation possible. The Marian grotto that stands before these hostels is a welcome sight for the truly spiritual inclined. Adjacent the hostels are the domestic quarters where most of our non-academic staff live. Almost like a village of its own, away from the mains of the seminary compound and seminarians, these quarters, are as a matter of fact, a tiny but very lively hub of human existence and activities, with its own characteristic chapel, which is put in use especially on Sundays.

A little gaze towards the east front of the seminary standing at the gate offers another welcome site of its own. The seminary academic block, with its labyrinthine architectural structure, which, at first sight, leaves the on-looker confused, is an asset of great value to our seminary. The block houses the two departments that are the pivot of our academic formation. Behind this block is the standard seminary library, dedicated to the illustrious Bishop Mark Unegbu of immortal memory. Our library has always been acclaimed the best of its sort among almost all the schools and seminaries around the Niger. We are grateful for such an asset. It is worthy of note that the same library complex also houses the Degree examination halls for both departments in the seminary (i.e. in its top floor). Adjacent this structure is the seminary auditorium. The remarkable grandiose nature of this structure with its rare architectural design expresses vividly the generous heart of its builders and makes it most accommodable for almost every form of activity. Yet to mention are the ultra-modern administrative block wherein is the Rector’s most magnificent office, the bursar’s office and which is the hub around which revolves all the seminary’s administrative activities. The Father’s house is another important house in our seminary. Here all the formators in the seminary live. Almost like the structure of the three student hostels this house has come to stand the taste of time among those found in other seminaries.

We cannot fail to mention the seminary farms that have come to stay in recent time. Owing to the growing need of self-reliance in the African church the seminary embarked, in the year 2004, on the project of establishing farms that will meet her subsistent agricultural needs. And so almost all the rear of the seminary compound (i.e. behind the auditorium and library complex have been converted into plantations for plantain, banana, pineapple, palm tree etc. We must, need mention also the seminary apiary that has existed almost since the inception of our seminary, where honey is harvested that is distributed to almost all the dioceses around us. Worthy of mention also is the livestock farm in which are reared cattle, pigs, poultry, snails, fish, goats, sheep etc. the Seminary also has an ultra modern technical workshop which is situated behind the seminary clinic, and a petrol filling station.

LOCATION

The seminary is located 3 kilometres away from the Owerri-Aba expressway, precisely at Ulakwo in Owerri North Local Government, Imo State-Nigeria. 5 kilometres away from the Seminary is the Imo Airport for local flights within Nigeria.