

OBIORA IKE

THE FOUNDING VISION AND MISSION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DIVINE LOVE BY BISHOP GODFREY MARY PAUL OKOYE AND THE CURRENT CHALLENGES – FIFTY YEARS AFTER

(1969 – 2019)

“FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON, BECAUSE WE ARE CONVINCED THAT ONE HAS DIED FOR ALL, THEREFORE ALL HAVE DIED. AND HE DIED FOR ALL, SO THAT THOSE WHO LIVE MIGHT LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR HIM WHO DIED AND WAS RAISED FOR THEM”

(St Paul 2 Corinthians, 2:14 ff)

1. Gratitude:

Allow me to start my presentation with a Litany of gratitude:

- To **the loving Father in heaven**, the principle of eternal and unlimited Love, our almighty God in a Trinity of Persons, without whom nothing is possible. It is by the mercy of God and divine providence that the work of the Foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Divine Love (DDL) came into existence. Mary - the Mother of Jesus, always present where her children are - “keeping all things in her heart” - shares this gratitude - for her care and protection over these 50 years (1969 – 2019).
- To **Godfrey Okoye Mary Paul Okoye**, priest, Bishop and our own ancestor and saint, whose inspiration and collaboration with the Holy Spirit of God has led to the Founding of the DDL Institute. He died in 1977, barely eight years after the foundation leaving the daughters at 8 years as orphans. One can hardly imagine being an orphan at 8 years, but Bishop Okoye answered the divine Will and left this temporary world for the eternal home in heaven to intercede for his Foundation. Now his good name and legacies linger into eternity and his cause for the sainthood in the universal church is assured. We pray for the grace to witness the next big jubilee occasion of the daughters of Divine Love celebrating his beatification and sanctification.
- To **the heavenly hosts of Angels and Saints** for shielding and offering much needed protection to the sisters, spread in over 200 territories and communities all over the world, witnessing in humble ministry of Love to a divided, crazy and sick world. The statistics show that the sisters number well over One thousand Five hundred professed women religious, many still in good standing, and this at a time when religious life is in regress in many countries, particularly in the western and eastern world.
- To the **Catholic Bishops of Enugu Diocese**, past and present, whose humble witness and large heart, filled with loyalty to the hard works and cause of GMP Okoye disposed them with their entire clergy and laity to welcome the sisters into Enugu as their home. The ecclesiastical circumscription of the Diocese of Enugu is the seat and headquarters of the Daughters. The reception accorded the sisters in Enugu with donations of large pieces of land and assets including properties bequeathed at various sites, such as land at Abakpa Enugu housing the novitiate and juniorate (the largest donation ever made of any diocese, not local community

in Africa to a religious congregation), made the “Daughters” know of their incarnation and welcome as daughters, sisters, friends and co-operators in the mission of Christ in Enugu Diocese.

- After the sudden death of Bishop G M P Okoye, his successors on the seat of the Diocese of Enugu, namely, the saintly and Blessed Michael Ugwu Eneja, Anthony Okonkwo Gbuji and the current gentle and wise Bishop C V C Onaga allowed the spirit of God to lead the congregation to its self-defined destiny within the Church. This opened the doors for a self-governing congregation of Pontifical Right of the Church and without undue interference in the evolution of the governance of the Daughters. Other religious foundations in history and even in some parts of our country Nigeria did not have this benefit of peaceful transition. We are aware of the historical and in some cases acrimonious struggles, leadership and power tussles with legal challenges that have even ended in the courts in Rome or before competent ecclesiastical courts where the congregations have dragged their founders to court in order to cut the umbilical cord towards independence. Not so with the DDL.
- To all the members of the Daughters of Divine Love who answered the call to follow Christ as both gift, sacrifice and challenge. This vocation continues to adorn the beauty of the Church and entire creation. The religious life of contemplation, prayer, sacrifice and charity is your strength.
- To the past and present Leadership of the Foundation, currently under the amiable and gentle woman, Mother Mary Anne Dike, who with her team of hardworking sisters have the privilege to host the occasion of this golden jubilee of the DDL.
- To the **uncountable numbers of good people** from various countries and regions and faith persuasions, seen and unseen, known and unknown. Gratitude is extended to several ardent believers in the cause of divine vocations to service and love around the world who have allowed themselves become instruments of God in the spread of the mission of Christ, that all may be saved and become one. ***It is this Love of Christ that urges us*** on and corresponds to the Vision, Mission and Values of the Daughters of Divine Love.
- To all those gathered at this golden jubilee event and celebration and listening to this presentation AND TO THE MANY SOULS OF SISTERS WHO HAVE DIED TO REST IN GODS PEACE.
- The good news is that, after fifty years of determined and purposeful followership and despite known and unknown challenges, the Daughters of Divine Love have reason to joy. We ponder on the eternal Love of God, who humbled Himself and in the incarnation became human to save fallen humanity (John 3:16; Philippians 2:6). God is Love. Fifty years after its founding the daughters have achieved many milestones. These are works of faith and life which stretch into Christian socio-pastoral ministries beyond boundaries. They include pastoral ministries that nurture and promote life and Gospel values. They give support to priests and catechists in many poor parishes. They extend to works of charity and integral development; teaching, training and education at all levels; health services and medical care; social work and counselling; research, legal and professional services; youth and women empowerment; justice, peace building and human rights; care and protection of children; management of resources, administrative work and organizational portfolios. Thank you.

2. DDL - A Foundation from the ashes of war and darkness in Biafra

“With the eyes of faith, everything is a gift;

Every Gift is a Call;

Every Call is an Opportunity;

Every Opportunity is a Challenge,

Every challenge is a Cross, and the Cross is Victory”

From the ashes of war, Daughters of Divine Love emerged. At the height of one of Africa’s greatest human tragedies of the twentieth century and in the midst of a ravaging civil war over the territory of Biafra, Nigeria’s Eastern region, the Religious Foundation – The **Daughters of Divine Love (DDL)** – **“Umu Ada Ifunanaya Chukwu”** - was born in **July 1969** at **Ukpor**. The Foundation inspired by the Holy Spirit and initiated by Bishop Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye (19 December 1913 – 17 March 1977) was in response to the call of the Second Vatican Council (1961 to 1965) *“to consider the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel” GS 1,2*). He was then the Bishop of Porthacourt (3 September 1961 – 7 March 1970) which territory had fallen to the Nigerian army, therefore a Bishop living on exile outside his seat. He was active nationally and globally, preaching and working for peace and reconciliation in Biafra and Nigeria, co-ordinating efforts to end the war, pleading for relief materials to save lives and bringing support to people in need. His efforts saved the lives of many children during the Biafra - Nigeria war

At the time of the Foundation of the Daughters of Divine Love, the devastating war which started from 6 July 1967 to 10 January 1970, following the military coup of January 1966 had cost 2 million lives of innocent children, the majority dying of malnutrition - hunger and disease.

The Biafra civil war cost further lives of another one million soldiers, women, men, youth and left three million persons displaced as refugees. Mention is made to the damage to people’s livelihoods and existential base, the trauma and psychological effects of hatred, disruption, loss and destruction which remains part of the legacies of the British imperial domination of Nigeria as its failed colony after over 60 years. The Biafra war still accounts as one of the bloodiest and gravest tragedies of human and modern African history.

Wars often do not begin overnight. There are many remote and immediate causes. Injustice stands as the sole reason for a war and the hegemony over colonies led by Britain, Arab countries, Russia and some major powers ensured that the military coup in Nigeria of 1966 with its unfortunate fall-outs be turned into long term strategic economic and political gain for those who supplied the ideas and the weapons of war. The war was funded by people who wanted to retain control of access and use of the large deposits of Oil Reserves on Biafra’s Niger Delta territory and the large mineral deposits of Nigeria as a country. The natives and locals did not understand that the fragmented colonial legacy of divide and rule, left by the British in 1960 with an imbalanced tripod of the geographical binding of incongruities, political, social-economic and cultural-religious, made it difficult to achieve justice and peace within a short period of post-colonial self-rule. A civil war broke out, but from the ashes of the war, the daughters of Divine Love Foundation was born.

3. Daughters of Divine Love - The Inspiration and Vision

The inspiration to give hope and enkindle love burned in the heart of GMP Okoye. His unquenchable taste for doing good and witness to the Divine Will in creation made him take advantage of every opportunity that manifested itself as an opportunity and a call. For people of Faith, even in the midst of war which constitutes one of the gravest of human tragedies in history, the Love of God pushes us on - *“caritas Christi urget nos” (St Paul, 2 Corinthians 2: 14).*

At the height of the civil war, families, young women and girls were homeless, ravaged, abused and desperate. Bringing these young women together under a Foundation, Godfrey Okoye thought, would bring them a sense of shared faith in God who is Love (John 1.1). He encouraged the sharing of this Love by witnessing to a Lifestyle which made the Daughters become sisters to one another, joining a cared for and caring community, at a time – religious life for African women was foreign, not encouraged, abhorred and exotic, since it was European missionaries who practiced this vocation. The Daughters would be a community of young women with courage to confront the fact that even *“in the darkest night shines the brightest stars”* – therefore becoming themselves agents of hope and messengers of the Love of God in a world characterised by fear, hatred, anxiety, crisis and doubt.

Godfrey Okoye believed in the eternal Love of God and preached it with his charismatic gifts and life and ministry. Therefore, he gathered these young women as a mark of a deep spirituality of service to the Love of God and for them to share in this love by giving it to others. This remains the vision, mission and values upon which the Daughters was founded.

The Foundation and community was called Daughters of Divine Love even before they would be described as sisters. This is spectacular. It is an identity that makes them human beings configured to the image of the Trinitarian God who is Love (1 John 4: 7-21). Being a daughter in Igboland is deep. The daughter shares the rights and duties of her father and has a status beyond marriage. She is embedded in the family with full rights and privileges including in many cases share in the portion of heritage of the father. The daughter is a stakeholder not visitor and has a natural, not delegated voting right. The daughter enjoys the Love of the Father especially as the beloved “Ada”!

Daughters of Divine Love in the name, constitution and mission are primarily daughters and secondarily sisters. This understanding helps the deep levels of relationship to the eternal God. As daughters in social anthropology and African cosmology which understanding is further grounded in theological reflection, the DDL congregation is a community of persons who are persons in a community. They are sisters in a Trinitarian understanding – with their source of strength and spirituality rooted in the Divine Love of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is Love. God is Truth. God is Light. God is One.

Thus, they would stand to speak and proclaim the truth in their mission of service for the truth because God is Truth. They shall be united and live as one because God is Holy and God is One. They shall Love and forgive each other through an act of charity in all its dimensions because God is Love. And they shall be the Light in a dark world because God is Light. And these attributes of God which correspond to Holiness (wholeness or completeness – *izu oke na ihe nine*), Truth, Love, One and Light they shall transmit to a dark world in need of salvation with many challenges confronting humanity – anywhere and anytime. In Biafra, it would be to the many homeless children and refugees who fled comfort zones and their homes and those in need of succour. They would perform much needed acts of Love and service to people in need by being agents of the Love of the Triune God in their own lives. Indeed the call to Holiness “Be you perfect because your heavenly father is perfect” remains the call to shared prayers, faith and hope that these women bring to bear in their ministries and services. As

contemporary society develops, these virtues and attributes shall be adapted for the people of each age and time. Their habit or uniform shall be blue and white because the symbols of heaven depict this – modesty and simplicity which acceptability of dressing design is adaptable for each age and time.

4. The man Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye – personal reminiscences of youth 1969 to 1977

I give this as a personal life testimony. I had the privilege to know the charismatic and great Bishop Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye from 1969 at Ukpok, as I was one of his junior seminarians admitted for Enugu diocese on exile at the All Hallows Seminary Onitsha (then also on exile) during the war at Ukpok.

The first group of a few daughters, rescued at the height of the war or invited to join the Foundation of DDL lived with us in the same village of Umunuko, a little distance away from the St Peter and Paul seminary Umunuko Ukpok. Our rector Fr Emmanuel Otteh lived under the same roof with the parish priest and main caretaker of the daughters, Fr Johnson Orjiakor. Our teachers Fr Timothy Anunobi, Fr Raphael Anasiudu and Fr Francis Akukwe all lived under the same parish house. The Daughters had accommodation in a nearby house and had initial formation from eminent spiritual leaders alongside the priests, such as Mother Mary Charles Anyanwu of the Benedictine monastery. We went to the same stream to fetch water at Ukpok and experienced the python snake, which as a “TOTEM and TABOO” was friendly and its life preserved as a symbol in tradition. The python in that community was not killed in those days. It reminds one of a cultural practices that replicates the deliberations of the just ended Amazon synod holding at the Vatican in Rome that calls for the preservation of all creation.

We returned to St John Cross Seminary Isienu at the end of 1970 together with the Juniorate of the Daughters of Divine Love, which was at the current Spiritan school of Philosophy at the same Isienu, near the seminary. Many encounters existed.

I served at his masses and I saw him visit our junior seminary every month. He knew his students almost all by name and spent time even kicking the football for the youth to play on occasions. He had time to listen to our stories and I did share some. Since I was placed in my function in the sacristy, I served at the many pontifical masses he celebrated in Latin, English and Igbo both at Holy Ghost cathedral Enugu, at the St John Cross seminary and at other diocesan functions including deaconate and priestly ordinations. I knew the bishop closely and reminiscence the aura of his personality whenever he entered any space. His majestic appearance. His broad smile and elegant laughter; His clean white and immaculate teeth; His love for children; His gait and ardour. This is one Bishop who loved to pray and spent hours in prayer and meditation. He walked in the fields saying his rosary and created enough time for this spiritual exercise.

I remember his sermons – delivered in vernacular or English and often interjected with Latin language. He would teach such lessons as *“Diligentibus Deum Omnia cooperandum ad bonum”* – *“For all you love God all things work together unto good”*. And he would exult the sisters *“Qui regular vivit, Deo Vivit”* *“Who lives according to the law, lives according to God”*. A man with a voice of Barry tone, preaching sermons that kept everyone spell bound for as long as he preached, often an average of one hour - and no one moved a head or desired for the sermon to end. He taught us that a priest is teacher, preacher, and prophet and needed

courage to stand to the truth of the Gospel with an all-round personality – in knowledge, eloquence, dressing, knowledge, content and virtue. He gave the same empowerment to the daughters maintaining that only those who use their skills and rationality optimally would qualify for a God who made us in His own image and likeness. Therefore, he sent people to study – wherever there was opportunity for such, both in Nigeria and abroad.

Bishop Okoye had articulate intelligence, sound reason and common sense and understood theology, philosophy, culture, anthropology, sociology, literature, psychology, human qualities and the art of rendering a teaching that even the smallest could understand.

Preaching the Word gave him joy. His book - *“The Glories of the Priesthood”* published in 1973 (and he did publish many works on various topics with his annual pastoral letters), made the Bishop admired as a man who believed what he taught and practiced what he believed (*Agnoscite quod agitis imatamini quod tractatis*).

I remember the man who made us young junior seminarians know what following Christ meant. It was all round. From him I heard that the priest must have two wings to fly – the wing of holiness and the wing of knowledge. He had a heart for the youth and could inspire anything with life around him. Children clung to the eminent greatness of his Excellency and they did often cry on his shoulders. He loved Christ and let the children and youth love him too. He spoke about following Jesus when called into any vocation radically and a spiritual radiance surrounded his words because he meant what he said and practiced it.

I remember the Godfrey Okoye who enjoyed promoting youth programs, training them in school, teaching them, telling stories. He was truly down to earth and his position or elevation as Bishop did not make him stay far from his flock. He knew each person by name, visited families individually, including going to the stadium to watch football with the youth and become a fan of the Enugu rangers Team. I remember how often he visited the Enugu Stadium on Saturdays to watch football, kick off the ball and enjoy soccer with a sportsman spirit.

He remained a Bridge builder for families in crisis or persons. Indeed even government officials threatened by crisis or divisions that resulted from all sorts of temptations came to him for counsel. He helped communities, homes, persons and institutions find enduring peace founded on justice across cultures, languages, classes of people and internationally.

I remember the development practitioner and integral human leader who had an all-round interest in human capital development: People. This did not stop him from erecting infrastructure for communities such as buildings, schools, hospitals and all this through continued land acquisition for the Church.

There are leaders in the world. And there are many leaders in the Church. Bishop Okoye was one unique leader who was just too much – a man with vision beyond the horizon. He saw tomorrow and planned for it as a visionary. Leadership implies vision. Like Moses on Mount Nebo who saw the Promised Land, GMP Okoye left his great legacy as a man who saw the future and lived the future in the present. This legacy of visionary Leadership stands unbeatable when compared to people occupying the same position in various parts of our country today. The Foundations of the Mount Calvary Cistercian Monastery at Awthum; the Knights of Mulumba and others have their inspirations and beginnings through him.

Here is a cleric and champion for justice, human rights and intercessor for oppressed people found often at Courts fighting for the rights of disenfranchised and oppressed people. He took governments to court because he believed in the rule of Law and in Justice. Politicians, the Military and dictators feared his integrity and behaved in his presence.

I remember the man who stood for the principles of Unity and Truth. Like St Anselm in the words of Raymond Bellarmine, he would teach *"unity in essential matters, differences in non-essentials but in all things charity"*. His belief and sense of unity and ability to compromise made him build networks and friendships across all of Nigeria and internationally.

A public servant and servant Leader whose dignity and height never made him forget his lowly beginnings but always found his space with the high and low. If one asked any child of Europe in the sixties and seventies of the name of any African Bishop, most would immediately mention Godfrey Okoye. At the Second Vatican Council of 1962 to 1965, his handwriting is found in the much-quoted Document *"Gaudem et Spes"* which reflects The Church in the Modern World, a topic that is relevant for all seasons and our times in Africa.

Here was a man who did not shy from the press, from the media or from the mundane but carried the Gospel to every place where he had opportunity. As a young boys scout and his altar knight from 1970 until 1975 when I entered the Bigard memorial senior seminary, my recollection was the great man who joined youth play football; watch soccer of the football clubs such as the Rangers international of Enugu play football at the Enugu stadium, an event which happened frequently in the 1970's.

Permit me to recall my journey to the priesthood. As a junior seminarian with a First Class (Distinction) at the WAEC and clearing all my 9 papers most of them in Alpha in 1974, Monsignor Stephen Ezeanya, the then Secretary of the Diocese sent me to teach as a student Tutor at the Sacred Heart Seminary Nsude from September 1974 to September 1975. The Rector of the sacred heart seminary was Father Paul Chinawa who gave me the responsibilities of teaching three subjects alongside being the Auxiliary. When the one year expired and I was to go to the senior Seminary, Father Paul Chinawa desired that I stay back to support his work further for another one year saying that I was still too young at 18 to enter the senior seminary. I was disappointed but accepted.

One day in November 1975, Bishop Okoye visited the Sacred Heart seminary Nsude but the Rector Father Paul Chinawa was absent. As auxillary, I was taking care of the seminarians and actually in class when he entered the class. His question and I recall very vividly: *"Boy what are you doing here?"* He asked me. I replied: *"I am on teaching apostolate. I have finished the first year and would spend the second year teaching because I am too young to enter the senior seminary"*? Godfrey Okoye retorted: *"Too young? It is young people like you that Jesus wants. Go now to the rector of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Msgr John Ogbonna and tell him that "mmu nwa bu Bishop Okoye zitalu gi ka ibanye senior seminary"(I bishop Okoye sent you to the senior seminary)*. I immediately ended the class, ran into the hostel, packed my things into a box and left for Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu.

I met the rector with my message from the Bishop and was immediately admitted in late November 1975 for the 1975/76 academic year which starts early October, two months after my class mates such as Jude Okolo, Paulinus Ezeokafor, Geoffrey Aguiwo, Valerian Okeke and

many others had entered Bigard. When the Rector Father Paul Chinawa returned, he was told that Bishop Okoye visited and had asked Obiora Ike to proceed to Bigard. Only personalities such as Bishop Okoye could do such inspiring and charismatic things. Paul Chinawa later doing his doctorate studies in Rome would often visit me in Cologne Germany and had several nights of laughter about the young man who was too young to enter the senior seminary.

I shared the joy of being taught by such eloquent teachers as Theophilus Okere, Michael Ugwu Eneja, Albert Obiefuna, Gregory Ochiagha, Silas Umoh, Chuba Okadigbo, Peter Inyang Etoh, Benedict Eboh, Francis Ugwueze and others. I remember the man who influenced me by his lifestyle to be "All things to all people" so that as a young priest upon ordination, I did chose the motto "*Omnium Omnia*"

I have my memories filled with GMP Okoye who loved and cherished the youth. He enjoyed and kept their company and did not miss an opportunity to encourage and advice young people. He visited the junior seminary severally at every opportunity. He easily helped the young to grow from their stupid mistakes by correcting them to do better instead of punishing and banishing them afar.

He understood that being a Father meant of the good and bad boy or girl. He had a large heart and like the story of the Father in the story of the Prodigal son, Bishop Okoye fills the image of that father described by Jesus in Luke Chapter 15. He hardly expelled seminarians as a Rector of seminaries and even those expelled by other rectors were accepted and retained by him. He was a truly "*refugium peccatorum*"(refuge of sinners) and had a chance for each person, never giving up on anyone.

Here is a great and true prince of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church who understood the dignity of the Catholic Priesthood, its magnificence and traditions. In liturgical and clerical appearance and knowledgeable of the traditions he represented, GMP nurtured and spread the Good News of Christ. Yet he opened up to ecumenical dialogues and built good friendships with the Anglican Bishop of Enugu, then Bishop Otubelu and other separated brethren.

I remember the man with an extraordinary life of charity and generosity who gave all he had to ensure that others could live. His pocket was open to anyone whose hands could deep into it, a generosity unfathomable and one, which I learnt from the life of St Francis of Assisi whom we try to emulate. His teaching "***no one is so poor that he could not give and none too rich that she could not receive***" remains a lesson for life. He gave of his time and energy, resources and means, wisdom and heart, knowledge and skills to empower his priests, the laity and the daughters and religious. He would spend money to buy needs of clothing, food, books and general items for the daughters and taught to do the same for their fellow sisters even when they had little themselves. .

I remember the man who hardly slept at night, who did not see his bed before 1.00am daily and who allowed the candle light or the kerosene lamp burn as he worked through his files in his office at the Holy Ghost Cathedral.

He lived for others and he died working for others – like the Lord – for the sheep that they may live. He is an ideal pastor and the good image of the Good Shepherd. He rests in the

peace of Christ and our faith teaches that those who die in the Lord live in Christ's peace. Bishop GMP Okoye continues to pray for us all for he has become our saint and forerunner on the pilgrimage to eternity.

5. Challenges and Opportunities for the DDL and Religious Life – fifty years after in the 21st century

*“Turning and turning in the widening gyre,
the falcon cannot hear the falconer.
Things fall apart. The centre cannot hold.
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (J B Yeats)*

- a) **Challenges:** The caption on the famous American TIME Magazine of April 3 2017 bears the bold inscription: IS TRUTH DEAD. It captures very graphically the spirit of the age and the tendencies across all culture and continents, more or less so.

The 21st century was ushered in with such hope and expectation and Pope John Paul II wrote his *“Tertio Millennio Adveniente”*. It was the announcement of the third Millennium of Christ with hopes for a better world, more justice and more peace. As we celebrate the year 2019, fifty years after the founding of the Daughters of Divine Love, global trends and experiences worldwide depict a world in crisis at all levels. The situation also shows a Church in crisis.

For many people of faith, religions and for religious, the crisis is identifiable in the sense of a crisis of truth and authority, of meaning and purpose, of vision and identity, of mission and values and a crisis of general leadership and orientation. The modern man questions the utility of existence and asks: What is the meaning and purpose of it all? *Wozu das ganze, wenn wir sowieso sterben müssen?* (Adam Schaff, Polish philosopher).

Yet humanity seemed to have turned its back to the divine, making itself the *“HOMO DEUS: A brief history of tomorrow”* as the recent book by Yuval Noah Harari portrays, and it is considered a Best Seller. Wisdom however teaches that a world wrong about God is definitively going to be wrong about humankind. What can the world do without God and without Christ?

Secularism has taken roots – starting with the fires of the 18th century enlightenment in Europe and with electric speed, influencing thought and lifestyles everywhere – in schools, governments, culture, churches and religious foundations. A more secularised and materialistic world with a digital revolution and technological knowledge has made relative all we knew of time and space. It has created virtual space into realities. One wonders what is real – the virtual internet or the real life that is touched and felt? A borderless world, invaded by means of mass communication, the social media, internet, telematics, informatics and the fact that nothing again is sacrosanct or even hidden.

We experience a global environment that is indifferent in many countries to religion, religiosity, piety and religious life and to some extent even averse to religion and church

structures. There is a current movement shifting fast away from Institutions be they Church, political, social or economic to new forms of individualism.

The signs are clear starting in the industrialised countries which have essentially become “pagan” or to be modest in expression “secular” to a large extent. There are few religious vocations in many countries; churches and convents are sold and transformed into hotels or playgrounds and centres.

b) The Opportunity: The award winning Film Sister Act of 1992 titled “I WILL FOLLOW HIM” starring WHOOP! GOLDBERG in an American Musical comedy directed by Emile Ardolino and written by Joseph Howard. It tells the story of the convent of the Future. The star Whoopi Goldberg is a lounge singer forced to join a convent after being placed in a witness protection program. She enters the convent and radicalises the place with modernity. Star actor, a fake sister. She introduces pub culture and art, dance and music, reggae and bob Marley into the convent, normally known before then to be traditional places of prayer with quiet for meditation and the classical music of Gregorian chant or Handel’s halleluiah. Sister Act film raked in financial success in grossing of over 231 million USD. The religious life and convent of the Future is in the film turned into something new for the people of the Age – and behold in the Film, Pope John Paul II and dances with the sisters. **Sister ACT Two** was performed in 1993 with a sequel titled: BACK IN THE HABIT”. Sister **ACT Three** is to be released at Disney, the USA this year 2019.

The film resonates the following tendencies, which form part of the challenges of the DDL after fifty years. There is a global push and internal church crisis causing a rift and tension between traditionalists and progressives, a movement towards Vatican III, Vis – a- Vis the call for a return to pre-Vatican I. For many congregations, the centre cannot hold.

The message of the Film Sister ACT is the challenge to hold the centre. It is finding common ground for tendencies that oscillate between uniformity and identity; between individualism and community Life; between new forms of authentic personal witnessing and the spirit of the founding of a congregation several years earlier, between blind followership and the innovative creativity; Finally between organized formation and self or auto-formation. The contradictions are many but are resolvable.

Then there is the crass discrepancy between the generations, in thinking, values, education, orientation, sense of tradition - of those who are elderly and those who are young and modern

There is also the challenge and a noticeable shift and movement away from traditional religious and community lifestyles to personalised and internalised individual Christian living;

Many sisters of the DDL, in fact, many of those who have professed since the jubilee year 2000 are Millennials. Most of those in the novitiate, postulancy or even the juniorate are born within the new Millennium – and belong to the generation of the Sister Act thinking, therefore a time to reflect and ponder on the future of the DDL and the legacies of the past – the gifts of the present and the challenges of the future.

6. **The central Message for action – 50 years ahead:**

The central message of these challenges can be summarised in the line of Thought of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops on the Church in Africa held in 1994 in Rome. The entire Church of Africa made Evangelisation its key theme.

The agenda of the Church of Africa is essentially the integration of the local diocesan Church's Synod agenda and that of the Universal Church towards the future of renewed Daughters of DIVINE Love, in union and faithfulness to the founding of its institute by the Church.

1. **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOOD NEWS:** The Daughters agree that the Proclamation of the Good News ought be centred on Jesus Christ, the same *"yesterday and today, the enduring and ever new manifestation of Gods goodness towards us. In him, the Spirit is given to us to transform the world"* (Nuntius of the Africa Synod, no 8). This Jesus Christ, Son of God, crucified and risen in glory is the reason for our faith and we can see in the Church the milieu for the expression of this faith. Jesus the Christ, our saviour and Lord must remain the centre and model of all aspects of our entire life, be it traditional, social, political, economic, cultural and otherwise. Our entire life and culture needs be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the mystery of Easter. There is therefore need for a house of formation and continued education for all the sisters young and old
2. **INCULTURATION:** Inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. The issue of Inculturation is a project of the present and the future for the daughters of Divine Love. Christianity in Africa has come to stay. We welcome the message of Love and peace, which needs to be incarnated in our hearts and every hut, home and hovel. The family is the first place for the meeting of the gospel and culture, therefore family apostolate and the practice of love which sign is sacrifice remains a challenge for the spirituality of the daughters. Incarnation is Inculturation and remains the challenge for mission today.
3. **DIALOGUE:** The Church as Family has its origin in the Blessed Trinity at the depths of which the Holy Spirit is the Bond of communion. Daughters of Divine Love is a Trinitarian congregation and builds its foundations on the pillars of dialogue. Dialogue has various levels and contexts. Dialogue does not make us give up the truth of our faith in Jesus Christ. It rather helps us open up to the knowledge of the position of the other in humble and listening dialogue. The principle is: *"Unity in essential matters; differences in unessential's. In all things Charity"* (St Anselm). The areas for this challenge to dialogue remain with traditional religions, with our separated brethren; with Muslims; within the local Church; amongst ourselves; between clergy and sisters; with the laity and within our own selves; with technology and modernity and with God.
4. **JUSTICE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT:** Integral evangelisation happens in a concrete context. We believe that Justice and Peace and Charity carried out through integral development are no options for the Daughters of Divine Love but are fundamental dimensions of our socio-pastoral ministry (Cf. Justice in the World; Statement of the Bishops, 1971, Rome). The priority to promote human dignity, human rights and the preferential option for the poor to victims of famine, ill health, unemployment, rape, abuse, injustices, ignorance, neglect and dictatorship remain our main tasks. The best

teaching is practice. We shall therefore not be seen to be fighting injustice and working for peace, we shall try in our own lives not to be unjust ourselves.

5. **MEANS OF COMMUNICATION:** The world of communication remains *“a new and emerging cultural universe and a series of means of serving communication”* (Nuntius of the Synod, 45). It is important to expand the scope, utility and concept of the means of communication as a new *“aereopagus”* – a meeting place – for the work of the Gospel. The training therefore of daughters of Divine Love as journalists and communicators makes the evangelization of the mass media possible. Social communication through the presence of the daughters in the world of the media, and through responsible management and where possible ownership of media, writings, pamphlets, books, research, radio, news and networks make the message possible.
6. **TRAINING OF THE AGENTS:** To achieve the above listed agenda and challenges, the training of each capable and talented willing sister in skills and professions is a high recommendation within possibilities and limitations. Such trainings need to happen early when they are still young and have ability to undergo rigorous educational trainings.
7. **FOCUS AND CLARITY:** Discipline and clarity without confusing messages happens to be the age-old language, which the prophets used to lead the children of Jacob to the Promised Land. In our times, discipline with focus and integral discipleship remains the way of the future. There does not seem to be any other viable alternative for a congregation with a bright and promising future. The Daughters of Divine Love are part of and contribute to the Hope of the African Church, which is the Church of the Future.
8. I thank you for your gift, the acceptance of the challenge and the desire to continue to sacrifice that *“all may have life and have it in full”* (John 10: 10)