

First African Born Priest Elevated Monsignor in the US and African born Catholics in the US Challenged to Be Church

By Dieudonné Ndouga

In this era of growing US Catholic Church multiculturalism, we have witnessed the integration of Catholics from different cultural backgrounds into the American Catholic Church. The creation of the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church (SCDC), the Sub-committee on Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travelers, the strengthening of African Conference of Catholics Clergy and Religious in the United States (ACCCRUS), the formation of the National Association of African Catholics in the United States (NAACUS) and the empowerment of newcomers as a whole bring a new momentum for “new migrants” and African Catholics in particular. It is time for African Catholics to be visible in the American Catholic Church.

The elevation of the first African born priest as Monsignor in the United States Catholic Church shows that the Church is characteristically universal. In a recent interview, Monsignor Anselm Nwaorgu stated: “It was the afternoon of June 5, 2009 that my Archbishop, the Most Rev. John J. Myers called me and told me that he had good news for me. He told me that His Holiness, Benedict XIV had elevated me to the status of a Monsignor in the Catholic Church. I was shocked. I asked him, ‘Who?’ and he said, ‘You’. In my disbelief, I just kept saying, ‘Archbishop, Archbishop, Archbishop.’ He then said to me: ‘You don’t have to say anything’ and told me that I should start using the title, ‘Monsignor’ effective that date.” The investiture and installation of Monsignor Anselm will take place at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark on the Twenty-four Sunday of Ordinary Time. What joyous news!

Born in Nigeria – Africa, Reverend Monsignor Anselm Nwaorgu was raised and nurtured in the Catholic faith. His desire to become an instrument of God and to share in the evangelizing work of the Universal Church took him beyond the shores of Africa to the United States where he was ordained a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey. Monsignor Anselm is a highly educated and qualified priest; he holds at least three (3) Masters Degrees and a Ph.D. (Counseling Psychology). He is a licensed Counselor in the State of New Jersey. He has received the John Paul II Medal for Superior Academic Work in Theology. He has published a book titled *Beating the Odds* and chapters in edited Books. He was the first Executive President of the African Conference of Catholic Clergy and Religious in the United States (ACCCRUS). The elevation of Monsignor Anselm Nwaorgu is an evident recognition of his accomplishments and positive contributions to the pastoral life and work of the Local Church of Newark and to the church in the United States in general.

In his homily at Mass in Washington, DC, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI recognizes that: “Two hundred years later, the Church in America can rightfully praise the accomplishment of past generations in bringing together widely differing immigrant groups within the unity of the Catholic faith and in common commitment to spread of the Gospel. At the same time, conscious of its rich diversity, the Catholic community in this country has come to fully appreciate the importance of each individual and group offering its own particular gifts to the whole.”

In this day and age, African Catholics are challenged to reach out to the hand extended by *Encuentro 2000* and the US Bishops in *Welcoming the Stranger Among US: Unity in Diversity*. The US Catholic Church has many faces and all are called at the “One Table of the

Lord.” The challenge to embrace this Church as a home for all and the need for African Catholics to realize that they are in this Church and here to stay will continue to be real. Our presence should be evident through our active participation in the life of the church here in the United States beginning in our local parishes. The liveliness and dynamism of our Africa faith heritage should be made manifest; our dedication and commitment to our church and ministries should be visible. Then our claim not just to be part of the Church, “but be Church,” in other to be validated. Africa Catholics must fully participate and become more active in the life of the United States Catholic Church beginning in their respective parish communities.

The elevation of the first African born Catholic priest to the rank of a Monsignor in the United States is an evident and active sign of the evangelical fraternity in the Church. Congratulations to Monsignor Anselm Nwaorgu and please join the Archdiocese of Newark in celebrating Monsignor’s investiture on September 13, 2009.

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