**Diocesan Pilgrimage for the celebration of 60 Years of Existence as a Diocese**

**and for the official opening of the extraordinary missionary month**

**the role of the religious women and MEN IN the local church iNSERTED INTO THE ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY**

*[There is] one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* (Eph 4:4-6)

On the above verses our religious vocation as women and men find its origin in the letter of St. Paul to the Romans:

“*For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us…”* (Rm 12:4-6).

In John 3:5 the Word of God says that the divine life was communicated to each one of us “in water and Spirit” at the moment of our rebirth which had continued to grow through the exercise of faith, hope and love.

The earliest monks, men and women – St. Anthony of Egypt, his sister and many more who came after him – testified to this fact. Religious life attracted many people around the places where the monks lived, for spiritual and social needs.

We have to be encouraged knowing that the contemplative life had its origins in Northern Africa in Egypt and Ethiopia. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said in his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *AfricaeMunus* (2011):

*Africa is the cradle of the Christian contemplative life. Present from earliest times in North Africa, especially in Egypt and Ethiopia, it took root in sub-Saharan Africa during the last century. May the Lord bless the men and women who have decided to follow him unconditionally! Their hidden life is like leaven in the dough. Their constant prayer will sustain the apostolic efforts of the bishops, priests, other consecrated persons, catechists and of the entire Church.* (n. 119)

Hence, religious life is “a special gift” of the Spirit to the Church, a part of “her life and holiness”; it is a privileged testimony to a constant search for God, to a love for Christ, both individually and communally, and to an absolute dedication to the growth of his Kingdom. It is a “search for perfect charity” and a total openness to the Holy Spirit who works in the Church and calls us to the freedom of children of God. Religious Life has faith as its foundation and love of the Lord, seen and served in our brothers and sisters, as a final goal.

Therefore the role of the religious in the Church demands that we live and work for the Kingdom of God. This gives us a certain freedom, a liberty of spirit to devote ourselves where our presence is most needed, without being tied down to any earthly compromises. However, after 60 years of the establishment of our diocese, we may examine our consciousness and see if we have lived up to the above standards. It is only in this way that we remind both the Church and the world that”here we have no lasting city” (Heb 13:14), rather we are all on our way towards our true homeland.

There are many religious institutes, societies and families of consecrated life in the Diocese, comprising of religious men and women.

Looking at the priests and men religious, we have the following congregations, roughly arranged in chronological order:

1. **Friars Minor Conventual (1931)**, who, as we know, were the pioneers of the diocese, and are the largest male congregation present in the diocese, active at the moment in six deaneries (Kalulushi, Kamfinsa, Kitwe, Luanshya, Ndola and Nkana) but that had started parishes throughout the diocese. They also run Mission Press, Audio Visual Studio and Twikatane vocational training centre.
2. **Missionaries of Africa (aka White Fathers, 1960)**, present in Kaloko (Bwana Mkubwa), and active with the chaplaincy of Ndola Teaching Hospital. They also run a Media Centre in Ndola.
3. **Missionaries of Mariannhill (1967)**, present in St. Nicholas (Chambishi, Kalulushi Deanery).
4. **Society of Jesus (aka as Jesuits, 1975)**, present with a centre in Parklands, Kitwe, and active with the chaplaincy of CBU.
5. **Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco (1991)**, present in Chingola with a youth centre and vocational training centre.
6. **Society of African Mission (1996)**, present in three deaneries (Kamfinsa, Mufulira and Ndola).
7. **Marist Brothers (2006)**, present at Chibuluma (Kalulushi Deanery) with a vocational training centre.
8. **Franciscan Missionary Brothers of Service (FMBS)**, present in Mufulira and St. Anthony Mission (Mpongwe). They also run a training centre in Agriculture and are building a seminary in Mufulira.

Looking at the women religious, we have the following congregations, roughly arranged in chronological order:

1. **Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart (OP)**, who were the pioneers among the sisters who came to the diocese (1937), and operate in Fatima, Mufulira and Ndola in the field of education and health.
2. **Sisters of St. John the Baptist (aka Baptistines, 1947)**, operating in Chingola, Kalumbwa (Lufwanyama), Kitwe and Ndola in the field of education and health, including a Special School for the Deaf.
3. **Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Assisi (1960)**, operating in Chililabombwe, Ibenga, Kitwe, Lufwanyama (St. Mary’s Mission), Luanshya and Ndola in the field of education and health, including a Special School for the physically disabled.
4. **Religious Sisters of Charity (1964)**, operating in Ndola in the field of health and social work.
5. **Holy Cross Sisters (1983)**, working in Kitwe in the education and pastoral field.
6. **Disciples of Jesus (1996)**, operating in Mishikishi and Kitwe in the field of education, having also a farm and a retreat house at Fisenge.
7. **Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Service (1996)**, present in Mufulira and St. Anthony Mission (Mpongwe), working in the education field.
8. **Sisters of the Child Jesus (…)**, operating in Ndola in the pastoral and social fields.
9. **Poor Clares (…)**, the first and only contemplative congregation present in our diocese, located in Fisenge / Kafankumba.

We also have some Lay Institutes of Consecrated Life:

1. **Association Pope John XXIII (1985)**, operating in Ndola in the education and social field, running also special schools and vocational training centre. One member of the community is a consecrated man.
2. **Community of Bethany Lay Institute (1986)**, founded by the late Bishop Dennis De Jong. They operate in Ndola and Mufulira in the field of education and vocational training.
3. **Secular Institute for Evangelical Crusade (1996)**, operating in Kitwe in the field of education and vocational training.
4. **Focolare Movement (2014)**, present with four consecrated women in Ndola.

Our role as religious is first of all to **pray, to contemplate and to intercede for our Diocese.** Indeed we are blessed now the family of the religious women is now complete with the coming of our contemplative sisters in the Diocese (the Poor Clares). We are now a full force to reckon with. Like the Pope John Paul II, now Saint, said at the opening of the Synod of AMECEA and IMBISA to our Bishops speaking about religious women/men:

“*Religious life, contemplative or active, has a value in itself to manifest the holiness of the Church...Your fidelity to your religious consecration and communion with the local Church are for everyone signs of the Kingdom*”

1. **Evangelization**

* The religious missionary women supported the religious missionary men who were the founders of the missions. Mostly the religious women were invited in order to evangelize the women and children. It was a great approach since the future of every nation begins with a mother and child. “*Even though a father may not be known.*” The future of the Catholic Church was secured by evangelizing women in our Diocese.
* The catechism was told by the sisters and the religious men were then cross examined by priests, and it happened at times that two or three would pass the test. The sisters had to be the godmothers of those first Christian women.
* The sisters told the first women Christians the reading skills and the women told the early religious women the traditional. The children had a great role too of accompanying the religious women where ever they went in the village.
* The religious women learnt to live the seasons as the local people lived, cultivating, harvesting. They also experienced births of children, the feasts, and illnesses and learnt to frequent deaths and burials.
* The Word of God was the Centre of their lives

**Like Vatican Council II on DIVINE REVELATION 2 (see &51-53**)

“ALL DOWN AGES GOD HAS SPOKEN TO THE HEARTS OF MEM AND WOMEN IN ORDER TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO HIM AND GRADUALLY LEAD HIM/HER TO THE TRUTH……” (53) This is verified by the letter to the Hebrews 1:1-2

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. 65, 95**

“Christ, the son of God made man, is the father’s one perfect and unsurpassable WORD. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one.”(65)

The religious women our Diocese in all this 6 decades have participated in the evangelization of the local Church using the three pillars; “*Sacred Traditions, Sacred Scriptures and Magisterium of the CHURCH in their consecutiveness and association that one of them cannot stand without the others (95)*

***Conclusion***

1. The Local Church grows from Centre which is the Word of God into social development programs. Since a person is not only a Soul but a Physical body. From catechesis the need to educate the children and women including men was growing.

* Education need was born
* Social programs as needs and main more apostolates were initiated by the religious women in collaboration with the local ordinary the Bishop.
* The consecrated have contributed to the life of the Church in Catechesis, Education, health and many more social issues
* The pastoral needs in parishes, in missions of our Diocese
* In the encyclical letter Redemptorismissioof the supreme pontiff JOHN PAUL II ON THE PERMANENT VALIDITY OF THE CHURCH MISSSIONARY MANDATE chapter VI Saint Pope John Paul II said *“Without witnesses there can be No witness, just as without missionaries there can be No missionary activity”.*
* The missionary institutes OF THE CONSECRATED WOMEN are the vital part of the ecclesial community and must carry their work in communion with the Church. Each institute exists for specific mission and must remain faith to founding charism.
* The general MISSIONARY institute of the consecrated life (women) came into being in church, through the PROPAGANDA FIDE FOR THE SPREAD OF THE FAITHAND FOUNDING OF NEW CHURCH.
* The joy of the Gospel Pope Francis “EvangeliiGaudium” said it all in chapter five of his writings, spirit- filled evangelizers- pray and work

*Sr. Bupe Salome Chileshe, sfma 2/10/2019*