

Review Article

## Phases in the Development of the Anglican Church in Ogbakiri in Ikwerre of Niger Delta, 1895-2020

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**Abstract:** The story of the church in Africa reveals how God is working a miracle of grace in the lives of His people. This paper examined the significant phases in the development of Anglican Church in Ogbakiri (Wezina) clan in Ikwerre of Niger Delta, Nigeria. It covered a period of 125 years from 1895 when Christian presence was noticed in the area to 2020. Answer to the question of how the Anglican Church was organised in Ogbakiri clan, and what is the impact of church in the Diocese of Ikwerre, Niger Delta of Nigeria? The historical and participant observation approaches were adopted in data collection and analysis. The paper revealed that the churches were organised as a Group in 1933, attained District status in 1950 under Niger Delta Pastorate, and in 1995 became Ikwerre South Archdeaconry. St Paul's Ogbakiri provided rallying point for churches in Wezina, Odegu, Rundeke, and Emohua clans as headquarters. The Archdeaconry was downsized in 2007 to comprise of Ogbakiri churches with the creation of Ikwerre Diocese. Ogbakiri faithful have entered the three Anglican Houses of Bishop, Clergy and Laity holding various positions of trust. The study revealed that Ogbakiri Anglican church is dynamic, self-supporting, youth friendly, and visionary. We recommend the opening of new congregations in the area, investment in welfare as well as income generating ventures for the sustenance and continuity of the church.

**Keywords:** Archdeaconry, Church, Development, District, Leadership, and Phase.

### INTRODUCTION

The coastal clan of Ogbakiri also referred to as Wezina is the cradle of Christianity in Ikwerre of Niger Delta region Nigeria. The Anglican mission had strong hold in the area and the faithful are known for their commitment in the things of God and His church. However, the area became devastated in 1999 due to internal crisis that sent the people into captivity. Peace was restored in the community in 2002; and the church faced restoration, reconciliation and reconstruction mission. Administratively, the church had passed through the Dioceses of Niger Delta, Niger Delta North, and Ikwerre with their various demands and challenges.

Critical examination of the developmental phases in the growth of the Anglican Church in Ogbakiri from 1895 to 2020 is the focus of this paper. The historical and participant observation approaches were adopted in data collection and analysis. The story reveals dynamism of Ogbakiri group of churches that had grown from District status to the Archdeaconry of Ikwerre South.

#### Christian Presence at Ogbakiri

The Ogbakiri people who proudly address themselves as Wezina are descendants of Ezina, who with his brothers Akalaka and Ochichi are believed to have migrated from Benin through Ogba to Ikwerre. He kept relationship with a widow at Ama-Ngwu in the present Rumuokani and had a son called Mgbakiri meaning oil bean tree. The name was corrupted Ogbakiri. The man in turn gave birth to the ancestors of the coastal towns of Oduoha, Okporowo,

Rumuoro, Ahai, Rumuokani and Rumuada in Emohua Local Government Area. Internal migration factors as in some other Ikwerre communities also existed in the area.

Christianity entered Ikwerre of the Niger Delta, Nigeria through the waves from the sea. Prior to the advent of Christianity in Ikwerre, Ikwerre people maintained friendly ties with their riverine Niger Delta neighbouring communities through trade, marriage, wrestling and other socio-cultural activities. The establishment of the church at Bonny on April 29, 1865 by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther led to the spread of the Christian faith in the Niger Delta. When Western education started in the riverine communities through missionary agencies, some Ikwerre families sent their children to be educated. In process of acquiring western education, some became converted to the Christian faith. Most of these converts returned home and started witnessing the love of God in Christ Jesus with passion to their kith and kin. They sowed the seed of the gospel and established Christian worship stations in some villages, towns, clans and kingdoms. The various Ikwerre communities received the Christian message at different times, from different directions and by different personnel.

The trade relationship that existed between Chief Ikiri Solomon Agbagbue of Oduoha-Ogbakiri and his Kalabari friends, led to the conversion of the former to the Christian faith, and was baptized as Solomon by Reverend Pokogbo. He returned home and started a Christian worship centre at Oduoha-Ogbakiri in 1895. In 1930, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was planted in Oduoha-Ogbakiri through other natives, namely; Beniah Ihuordu, Thomas Ordukwuru, Ebulu Otakpue and Solomon Okenwor. The two decided to merge in 1940 to strengthen the unity and development of both the church and community. Thus, the present Saint John's Anglican Church, Oduoha-Ogbakiri (Onu, 2018). The Christian faith with and without plan began to penetrate the various Ogbakiri and indeed Ikwerre villages, towns, clans, and kingdoms.

Some Kalabari Christian traders of the African church and Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP) started a worship centre at Ahai waterside in early 1900. The congregation later became Saint Clement church, Ahai. The conversion of Job Wahunoro, Josiah Odum, Johnson Orlukwu, Amos Okechukwu and Robert Iyo was at the church. The St Michael's Anglican church Rumuoro was started through the 'umbrella episode' of January 1, 1930 with members of Kpaliku-Imo and Woke families. Rumuokani remained part of Rumuoro community until 1941, when Ogbakiri Council of Chiefs granted them autonomy; and this gave rise to the establishment of St. John's Anglican church, Rumuokani.

It was said that some Okporowo natives were converted through the Ahai church probably in 1905; as Ogbakiri central school was opened at Okporowo in 1908 (Onuegbu, 2011). One Orlu of Okporowo whose slave and wives died suddenly; and the surviving wife was very sick with dropsy, visited his friend Amachree Igba at Buguma and shared his predicaments. He was advised to forsake his traditional shrine and embrace Jesus Christ which he did and was baptized as John. Returning home, he shared his testimony with Sampson Orlunwo and Achonwo and they became converted. On Sunday, the trio went to worship at Ahai waterside Chapel and there met Mekwa, Egile and Ajinwo who also visited the church to seek for solution to their miseries. After worship, Jally and Loloma led them back home as they sang melodiously;

*Eze huruanyi n'anya* (God loves us);  
*Hurrah, Hurrah, Wanyanabo* (Our Lord).

John Orlu and his friends surrendered their traditional worship objects which were publicly destroyed. His wife received through divine healing and many became converted to the Christian faith. In 1911, one Mr Taylor of the NDP was posted to pastor the Church Okporowo church.

The neighbouring Ikwerre clans of Odegu (Rumuodogo) received the gospel in 1900 through Rev. Dr Agbebi of the Baptist mission; Ibaa church was planted in 1901 through a native Evangelist, Deborah Erinwo Wojiewhor. The Oduoha- Emohua church was started in 1904 by Chief Orduwiche; and in 1908, Evangelist Deborah Erinwo Wojiewhor established Christianity at Ibaa (Onu, 2018).

### **Group Church Phase**

Thus, the principal Christian denomination planted in Ogbakiri was CMS, Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP), Anglican Church simply referred to as Delta church.

When Okporowo church encountered diverse persecutions, the Superintendent of Kalabari NDP Church- Rev. Kemmer did not provide expected encouragement. In response the Okporowo congregation changed to the African church. However, in 1933, they lost confidence in the leadership of the African and affiliated to the Church Missionary Society (CMS), unaware that NDP and CMS are one Anglican family. In the same 1933, some CMS faithful from Port Harcourt, accompanied by Okporowo brethren, visited Ahai and shared some testimonies to the effect that, "everybody in the existing African Church was converted to the CMS" (Orlu, 1994 p.38).

The Okporowo church delegated Tennyson W. Amechi (later Anglican Catechist) and Thomson Woha (first Anglican Lay Reader) to meet the CMS authority in Port Harcourt. They met Rev. F. Dodds of the Primitive Methodist Native Church who directed them to Rev. S. N. Okagbue at St. Peter's CMS Port Harcourt; who took them to Right Reverend A. M. Gelsthorpe, Assistant Bishop on the Niger. Consequent on their second visit to the Bishop, the African church congregation was on August 14, 1933 became affiliated with the CMS. However, Charlie Ohaka and a few others continued with former. Thus, the present Saint Paul's Anglican Church Okporowo.

The St. John's church Oduoha-Ogbakiri experienced some challenges with commitment of locals and could not meet up with the payment of increased stipend of the School head teacher. To that effect, the church school was relocated to Okporowo, a more viable community. From then, St. Paul's church and school became the rallying point of Ogbakiri group of churches and environs. In 1933, the church was made headquarters of Ogbakiri Group in Port Harcourt CMS (St. Peter's Hospital Road) District.

### **Ogbakiri District Church**

The Anglican Church is organised for effective missionary work and administration under Province, Diocese, Archdeaconry, District, Parish, and church stations. The diocese, is an aggregation of parishes and congregations under the administrative and pastoral care of a bishop operates with a Constitution. The *Constitution and Regulations of the Niger Delta Diocese* provides for the formation of Archdeaconries, Districts, Parishes and Annexes thus; The Diocese shall be divided into Archdeaconries, as shall be determined by the Bishop in consultation with the Diocesan Board. The Archdeaconries shall be divided from time to time into definite areas which shall be constituted as Districts, Parishes or Annexes. A Parish shall consist of one or more congregations and any Church in the Parish may be appointed by the Bishop with the approval of the Diocesan Board as Parish Church of the Parish. An outlying area not constituted into a Parish shall be called an Annex. A District shall consist of any number of Parishes and Annexes or of congregations not yet constituted into Parishes or Annexes (n.d., p.25-26).

The primary purpose of creating Archdeaconries and parishes is for the spread of the gospel and administrative convenience.

The Rev S. N. Echezona was posted to St. Paul's Okporowo in 1944, to prepare the area for a District status. He pastured the people for three years and was succeeded by Rev. B. J. D. Long-John. The progress report of the area presented to the Delta Church authorities convinced the leadership of their readiness and viability; and on February 7, 1950 the Delta Archdeaconry Board approved the creation of Ogbakiri District out of Port Harcourt. The District had 18 church stations sub-divided into five groups of Ogbakiri, Emohua, Ibaa, Ndele and Odegu for easy administration (Orlu, 1991). The Rev. F. I. Mberedogu served as the first District Superintendent and vicar of St. Paul's Okporowo.

Fourteen years after the creation of Ogbakiri District, significant progress were noticed in evangelism, finance, and physical development. The Delta Church authorities recognised the efforts of Ndele group of churches and constitutionally created Ndele District out of Ogbakiri in 1964. The Foundation stone of the headquarter church, St. John was laid by Bishop C.J. Patterson in 1941. The churches of the District were St. John's Ndele, All Saints' Ibaa, St. James' Rumuji, St. Mark's Rumuewhor, St. Peter's Omofo, St. Paul's Egamini, and St. Matthew's Agba-Ndele (Orlu, 1991). Thus, Ndele became first post-Independence Ikwerre Anglican church district. Sometime later, Agba-Ndele had difficulties in financing the church school; the community demanded that the church be converted to the Baptist mission which helped them receive grant from the Government. It was the strategy of then Ikwerre Education Officer, Chief E. J. A. Oriji of Emohua a Baptist faithful to expand the frontiers of the Baptist church in Ikwerre.

### **Response to the Ordained Ministry**

A fundamental goal of the CMS mission in Africa "was not to establish itself but to establish a church- a church for the local people run by the local people, so that the Mission could move on and do the same elsewhere, farther and farther afield" (Decorvet and Oladipo, 2006, p.19). The missionary policy of "self-support" that characterised the work in the Niger Delta mission was an idea of Rev. Henry Venn, CMS General Secretary. It was expected that natives would be raised to be involved in the propagation of the gospel and administration of the church in the area. Many Ogbakiri faithful offered to serve as church Agents and Catechists from the early days of the church. They did not progress to the ordained ministry until the 1950s.

The earliest person to be admitted into the Anglican ministry was Samuel Onyuku Elenwo. His ordination took place at Lagos in 1957. He was later elected and consecrated a bishop in the church of God March 1, 1981 at St James church Oke-Bola, Ibadan; and enthroned 4<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Niger Delta Diocese. He was later translated as foundation Bishop of Diocese of Niger Delta North May 16, 1996. The second priest Alexander Obu Enyindah ordained in 1960, became first native Archdeacon. Others who have joined the ordained ministry are Ven. Innocent Chima Amechi, Ven. Napoleon Onuegbu, Ven. Fortune N. Okechukwu, Ven. Okechukwu Owmondah, Ven. Sullivan S. B. Odike, and Ven. Dr

Emmanuel Nheeme, Canon Jeremiah Amah, Canon Barnabas Emesiobi, Canon Augustine Orlukwu, Canon Prince Wenike, Canon Charles Okoro, Canon Simeon Nkpurukwe, and Canon Christian Oziezi. Rev R N Wokama, Rev Michael T. Woha, Rev William W. Osilem, Rev J W Osilem, Rev S N Owhonda, Rev Isaac Chindah, Roy Odike, Rev Simeon Echie, Rev Samuel Elenwo, Jnr, Rev Nyeche, Rev Riches Amini, Rev Solomon Foby, Rev Christopher Orlukwu, and Rev. Chinedu Amaechi.

### **Inauguration of Ikwerre South Archdeaconry**

The Port Harcourt Archdeaconry that came into effect January 1, 1972 and was inaugurated March 5, 1972 at St. Paul's Diobu, Port Harcourt. Samuel Yemem Chukuigwe (Isiokpo native) was appointed pioneer Archdeacon of Port Harcourt by Bishop Yibo Fubara. Chukuigwe was ordained in 1955, collated Archdeacon February 27, 1972 at St. Stephen's Cathedral Bonny, and retired in 1983. Bishop Samuel Onyuku Elenwo (Okporowo native) appointed Alexander Obu Enyindah (Okporowo native) second Archdeacon of Port Harcourt. At the Archdeaconry Board held in January 1987, he proposed the creation of more Archdeaconries along existing Local Government Areas. The idea was an extension of Archbishop Joseph A. Adetiloye's vision "to make every state capital of Nigeria a Bishopric of the Church of Nigeria" (Nwankiti, 1998, p. 28). The vision gave rise to the inauguration of eight Missionary Dioceses in September 1990. The proposed zones for an Archdeaconry were Ahoada, Etche, Ewo, Ikwerre and Ogoni. Districts/Parishes were grouped together with an insight into ethnicity, linguistic ties, and geographical expression. A Planning Committee for each zone was formed with the Archdeacon as co-ordinator. The committees were charged to find ways and means of creating the Archdeaconries. A key condition for including any District/Parish into the proposed Archdeaconries was their ability to clear all indebtedness to the Diocese and Archdeaconry.

The proposed Ikwerre Archdeaconry comprised of the Districts/Parishes of Isiokpo, Ogbakiri, Elele, Ndele, Omagwa, Omudioga and Ibaa. The planning committee mobilised churches, the sum of ₦9,700.00 and ₦32,501.49 were raised, and paid to the Diocese and Archdeaconry respectively. St. Peter's Isiokpo was chosen as headquarters against St. Paul's Okporowo. An application was made to the Diocesan Board for the creation of Ikwerre Archdeaconry and received endorsement with three others at the Synod of May 21, 1988 held at St. Michael's Church Buguma. Each of the new Archdeaconries were to make deposit of two years Archdeacon's salary to avoid certain discrepancies as practiced all over Dioceses East of the Niger and Church of the Province of Nigeria (Elenwo, 1988). The affected Districts/Parishes fulfilled the conditions including payment of ₦10,800.00. Consequently, on January 1, 1989 Ikwerre Archdeaconry came into effect, and was inaugurated by Bishop S. O. Elenwo at St. Peter's Isiokpo February 11, 1990. The then Isiokpo District Superintendent, Innocent Amechi (Okporowo native) was appointed the first Archdeacon. He was born in 1940, ordained December 23, 1975 and collated Archdeacon on February 12, 1989 at St. Cyprian's Church Port Harcourt.

Four years later, the stage was set for the birth a new Archdeaconry out of Ikwerre. Jesus Christ charged his disciples to allow the children come to him, and prevent them not (Mark 10:14). The scripture says; "Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Again, "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). The leadership of Ogbakiri district opened their door for young people to share in the affairs of the church by electing some into Parish Church Council (PCC). In 1993, some youths of Oduoha church attended the Synod at St Peter's church Yeghe, headquarters of Ogoni Archdeaconry. They noticed ecclesiastic growth pattern in Niger Delta Diocese and were moved to key into it. The young men shared their vision with members of Ogbakiri district standing committee and were encouraged to convene a meeting of all churches that hitherto constituted Ogbakiri district.

The leaders and two delegates from each of the churches were invited for a meeting at St Paul's Ogbakiri. It was a kind of reunion fellowship as many of those who attended had not met with each other for some years past. The vicar of the church led in the devotion, thereafter, Mr L.E. Echie explained the purpose of the August gathering to wit: forming a new Archdeaconry. The delegates expressed gladness with the idea and agreed that "the matter be carried home for discussion in the various churches" (Echie, 1996, p. 8). Again, that the meeting be reconvened within four weeks. The second meeting which involved the churches in Wezina, Emohua, Odegu, Rundele, and Uvahu clans being members of old Ogbakiri District attracted more attendance and an impetus was given to the new Archdeaconry vision thus; that the Ogbakiri District Committee that initiated the movement be dissolved; and that a Steering Committee comprising of members from all districts and parishes be formed. Those elected as officers of the Steering Committee were: Sir Chief Justice E.N.T. Ebete-Chairman; Mr L.E. Echie- Vice Chairman; Chief O.O. Ekwueme-Treasurer; Sir Sunny S. Orlu-Secretary; Mr Michael Maru-Assistant Secretary; and Representatives from each of the affected districts and parishes. The third meeting now chaired by the Steering Committee head gave the following fundamental definitions:

1. That the name of the new Archdeaconry shall be known as Ikwerre South;
2. That the headquarters of the new Archdeaconry shall be St Paul's church Okporowo; and



3. That a formal application be forwarded to the residual Ikwerre Archdeaconry board through the Archdeacon and copied the Diocesan (Echie, 1996).

In March 1994, the Steering Committee submitted an application to the residual Ikwerre Archdeaconry requesting to be constituted into a new Archdeaconry. The board, after preliminary discussion, consented to their prayer, and forwarded the application to the Diocese. The letter signed by E.N.T. Ebete and nine others stated thus: We, on behalf of ourselves and the entire District and Parishes in the former Ogbakiri District, hereby apply for the creation of an autonomous Archdeaconry out of the present Ikwerre Archdeaconry. The Archdeaconry is to be known and called IKWERRE SOUTH ARCHDEACONRY with its headquarters at St. Paul's Anglican Church, Okporowo Ogbakiri. Our request is based on the following facts:

1. That Ogbakiri District was inaugurated as far back as January, 1952. The District stands as one of the oldest Districts in the Niger Delta Diocese.
2. That the former Ogbakiri District had been able to spread the gospel of Christ to all the nooks and corners of the former District;
3. That the following Districts and Parishes were carved out from the former Ogbakiri District and should form the proposed Ikwerre South Archdeaconry-
  - a. Ndele District;
  - b. Ibaa Parish;
  - c. Odegu District;
  - d. Oduoha District; including the
  - e. Residual Ogbakiri District.
4. That the creation of another Archdeaconry out of Ikwerre Archdeaconry will enhance the speedy development of the churches in the area.
5. And that it is the policy of the Diocese to create more Archdeaconries, Districts and parishes in viable areas to decentralize the general administration of the Church. We are prepared to meet all the requirements governing the creation of an Archdeaconry and would pay in our deposit as soon as we hear from you (Onu, 2007, p.143-144).

The request was to maintain ancient ecclesiastical landmark, foster fellowship, respect constituted authority and enhance development. The letter was read at the floor of Niger Delta Diocesan Board meeting held at St. Matthew's church, Nkpogwu on April 6, 1994. However, representatives of Ibaa Parish and Emohua declined signing the application. Ibaa gladly choosed to remain in Ikwerre Archdeaconry on the basis of proximity to Isiokpo, headquarters of Ikwerre Archdeaconry. The Emohua group of churches withdrew from membership of the proposed Archdeaconry probably to express their displeasure with the preferment of Venerable Innocent Amechi (Ogbakiri native) as Archdeacon of Ikwerre by Bishop Elenwo (Ogbakiri native) instead of Reverend Canon Frank Agala-Okor (Emohua native) who was senior in ordination. The Wezina and Odegu churches overcame the hurdles with determination, and resubmitted on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1994. The letter signed by E. N. Ebete and Orlu called for deletion of Ibaa Parish and Emohua District from the original application and emphasized, "we earnestly solicit your kind and prompt consideration to enable the proposed Ikwerre South Archdeaconry take off in January, 1995" (Onu, 2007, p.145). The Diocesan inspection team visited the area to ascertain their viability in manpower, infrastructure, and finance. The prayer of the people received answer on November 23, 1994 at the Diocesan Board meeting held at St. John's church Rumueme. The Board approved the creation of Ikwerre South Archdeaconry alongside Opobo, Brass and Eleme. The St. Mark's Rumuewhor, St. Michael's Rumuoro and St. George's Oduoha received endorsement of the Board as a Parish (*DNDN Synod Report*, 1995). The sum of thirty thousand (₦30,000.00) naira deposit was immediately paid to the diocese by the Oduoha-Ogbakiri youths to fascinate smooth take-off of the new Archdeaconry. The decision of the Diocesan Board was rectified May 1, 1995 by the second session of the 15th synod held at St. Matthias church Okomoko/Egwi/Umuanyangu, Etche Archdeaconry, April 29-May 3, 1995.

The Steering Committee nomenclature was changed at her post-Synod meeting to Planning/Inauguration Committee and enlarged to include Entertainment and Publicity Sub-committees. The membership became: Sir Chief Justice E.N.T. Ebete-Chairman; Mr L.E. Echie-Vice Chairman; Chief O.O. Ekwueme-Treasurer; Sir Sunny S. Orlu-Secretary; Mr Michael Maru-Assistant Secretary; Mrs Rachael Echie-Women Representative. The Executive members: Mr Isaiah J. Emeji, Mr N. O. Azunda, Hon Sam Maru, Mr S. S. Wenike, Mr A. B. Odike, Mrs Comfort Okoro, Mr Alex N. Ichendu, Sir Chief G. A. O. Omordu, Mr Dan Anwuri, Mr J. A. Onwevadu, Mr A. C. Oruge, Mrs Love Olewem, Madam Love Owhorji, and Lady Florence Ebete.

Ikwerre South Archdeaconry came into effect June 1, 1995. The Diocesan, Samuel O. Elenwo preferred the Superintendent of Ogbakiri District and Vicar of St. Paul's Okporowo, Reverend Canon Lazarus N. Nwafor (Eberi native) an Archdeacon to pioneer the leadership of the new Archdeaconry. He was collated Archdeacon December 17, 1995 at St. Stephen's Cathedral Bonny. On April 14, 1996 at St. Paul's Okporowo, Bishop Samuel Elenwo inaugurated the Archdeaconry.

Later in 1997, the Emohua group of churches joined Ikwerre South Archdeaconry. A letter signed by Ojirika, Obinna and Kejeh dated April 22, 1997, to the Bishop of Niger Delta North Diocese through the Archdeacon of Ikwerre read thus;

A resolution was passed by the congregation of St. Luke's Anglican Church, Emohua on Sunday the 20 of April, 1997 to the effect that St. Luke's Anglican Church should now join the Ikwerre South Archdeaconry. This decision derived from other decisions that had been taken before that date by the various committees of the Church such as the joint meeting of the Parochial Church Council and the Working Committee, the Women's Christian Association (WCA), the Men's Christian Association (MCA) who sat at various times to consider the pros and cons of joining the Ikwerre South Archdeaconry. The Church finds it more convenient to relate with the Ikwerre South Archdeaconry. In addition, we would like to remind your Lordship that the former constituent Churches of Emohua District, namely, St. George's Church, Oduoha and St. Philip's Church, Elibrada, have all decided to be under Ikwerre South Archdeaconry, It would therefore be odd for St. Luke's Church not to be part of Ikwerre South Archdeaconry (Onu, 2007, p. 146).

St. Philip's church disassociated themselves from the above. Onyuku, Udeh, Amadi and Onuigwe in their letter of May 12, 1997, claimed that Emohua District did not consult them before arriving at their decision to join the Archdeaconry. Eventually, Elibrada parish buried their difference and decided to walk with the brethren of Ikwerre South. The development brought all churches in the old Ogbakiri district except Ibaa under Ikwerre South Archdeaconry. In 1988, the Archdeacon, Ven. E. S. O. Amadi acknowledged the development saying; "We also received and accepted the request of a District and a Parish of Emohua group of churches to the Ikwerre South" (*DNDN Synod Report*, 1998, p. 148).

### **Ogbakiri Church in Captivity**

The crisis that rocked entire Ogbakiri clan with loss of lives and properties affected the church in diverse ways. At the beginning of 1999, Ogbakiri district that comprised of Okporowo, Ahai, Rumuokani, Oduoha and Rumuoro was left with only Okporowo and Ahai churches. The other communities were invaded and devastated by inter-village crisis which mounted pressure on the two churches especially Okporowo. Different intercessory groups met in the church, raising their voices to God in prayer for peace. However, on Tuesday May 9, 2000, at precisely 5.30am, Okporowo and Ahai were invaded and devastated, and the people had to run to different communities for refuge. The then Archdeacon of Ikwerre South, Ven. S. S. B. Ntor who assumed pastoral leadership of the area in January 1999, was forced to flee with his family to St Luke's church Emohua where they took refuge and had to squat. In his words, "we are grateful to the Vicar, the PCC and members of St Luke's church Emohua, especially to Chief G. A. Onuekwa and his family for providing the Archdeacon and family with accommodation in his home" (*DNDN Synod Report*, 2000, p. 129). The shock of the crisis made him to developed hypertension, and latter "stroke" (Onuegbu, 2011, p. 29). Thus, Ikwerre South Archdeaconry headquarters and indeed entire Ogbakiri church went into captivity.

The authorities of Diocese of Niger Delta made Saint Luke's church Emohua headquarters of Ikwerre South Archdeaconry in January 2000 to maintain pastoral care of the people. Ven. Edmund Chike Ogwo was transferred to Emohua as Archdeacon of Ikwerre South and Vicar of St Luke's. The temporary headquarters status of the church naturally posed some challenges as the church was not prepared for it. These included furnished accommodation for the Archdeacon, curate and lay workers; and payment of their stipends and allowances which hitherto had remained persistent monthly problem. The crisis denied Ikwerre South more than 60% of the recurrent quota needed to run the Archdeaconry.

In humble obedience, St Luke's church as stake holder in the Archdeaconry; adjusted and allowed God have His way in the circumstance. The Scripture said, "The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his household" (2 Samuel 6:11). King David moved the ark of the Lord into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite following the death of Uzzah. The two years temporary headquarters of Ikwerre South at St Luke's eventually became a source of great blessing. The Archdeacon and wife demonstrated missionary fortitude and magnanimity in understanding the problems of the church and initiating projects that have become historic monuments.

Numerically, the church experienced increase within the pilgrimage period. The clerical workers and their families increased from the usual one to two. Rev. Felix Monday, Rev. Ben O. Onu, and Rev. Nathaniel Wachijem served as curate with Ven. E. C. Ogwo. Good number of Ogbakiri natives who found refuge within Central Emohua became regular worshippers in the church. The zeal and passion of the ministers ushered in a wind of revival in the church and the community. The foundation of Men's Christian Association (MCA) now Christian Men's Fellowship (CMF) was laid by Ven. Ogwo. Many clergymen who served in the church unmistakably demonstrated that the gift of the Holy Spirit is very much in the church. The "prayer warriors" were reputed to have successfully prayed for the sick and the dying remarked Obinna (2007). Rev. Felix Monday initiated an open air prayer session and jointly with Ogbakor Emohua attracted all sons and daughters of the Emohua to a prayer retreat at the playground of Emohua Secondary

School. The programme has become an annual event by Emohua Gospel Ministers Forum. Through the response of Ogbakiri natives who came to the church, Rev. Ben O. Onu revived the follow-up and Bible study ministry. The evangelism spirit that was fuelled then, gave rise to the planting of Holy Ghost church, Mgbuitanwo in 2001 after a crusade. The church fell under the sponsorship of New Covenant Church, Oroabali from June 2001 that assisted in finance and spiritual welfare. A home fellowship was started in the house of Charles Onyukwu of Isiodu which eventually gave birth to a new congregation; and in 2002, an Archdeaconry crusade was held in the church.

Administratively, most of the Archdeaconry engagements and meetings were held in St Luke. The church was licensed by the Ministry of Interior to conduct statutory marriage. In infrastructural development, the church had so blessings to count. The vicarage was furnished to accommodate the Archdeacon. Through the Archdeaconry women led by Mrs Florence Ogwo, a water bore-hole was constructed in 2001 through the generous support of Hon Chief Sergeant Awuse. Mrs Ogwo initiated and completed a mini-hall project for children worship in 2002. Again, she “prompted the women of St Luke’s church to build a shopping complex on church land... at the northern boundary... with Rumuakunde village” (Obinna, 2007, p. 70). The structure became the first major external revenue earner for the church. Mr Samuel Chezu and Dimkpa Orlunwene flagged off the erecting of church fence (*DNDN Synod Report*, 2002). Through the visits and discussions of Ven. & Mrs Ogwo with Chief Sergeant Awuse, the church perimeter fence was completed. The period prepared the church for effective leadership position that came into effect in 2007 with the creation of Emohua Archdeaconry under Ikwerre Diocese.

### **Restoration of Ikwerre South Archdeaconry Headquarters to Okporowo**

The return of Ogbakiri from captivity was an answer to the prayers and consultations of men and women of goodwill including Rivers State government, Ogbakor Ikwerre and other well-meaning groups. Eventually, in 2002 peace was restored in Ogbakiri. Ven. Ogwo assigned Ordinand Kingsley Ogbonda to commence worship at St Paul’s Okporowo and minister to the early returnees. On May 18, 2002 a thanksgiving service was held to mark the return of peace in Ogbakiri clan. A major witness to the return of peace in Ogbakiri after “Pilgrimage experience” is in the song:

|  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| <i>Chiokike kanu-maa,</i>              | God Almighty says       |
| <i>Mawa tuma ogwu;</i>                 | I should not be afraid; |
| <i>Obochiburuoma</i>                   | Better days             |
| <i>Zinu ruwhu!</i>                     | Lies ahead!             |
| <i>Yanu sarima zinu rime Chiokike,</i> | And joy in Almighty God |
| <i>Ozulem-maa</i>                      | Is enough for me.       |

The restoration of Ikwerre South Archdeaconry headquarters to St Paul’s Okporowo witnessed “reconstruction, rehabilitation and spiritual renewal” of the church and entire Ogbakiri Christian community, and the ministers faced the task with devotion. Archdeacon Ven. E. C. Ogwo reported that under the leadership of Rev Kingsley Ogbonda assisted by Rev Maurice Enwereji, the Archdeaconry Evangelism Board kept the entire Archdeaconry spiritually alive (*DNDN Synod Report*, 2004). The reconstruction of the vicarage, a multi-purpose hall, and a total face-lift with facilities such as water bore-hole were simultaneously under taken in preparation for the hosting of the third session of the third Synod of the Diocese of Niger Delta North at St Paul’s Okporowo. The Synod which focused on “Evangelism and Mission, the Heartbeat of God” (Mark 16:15) remains remarkable to church, faithful, and the community. It resolved among others that 10% of the annual budget of the Diocese, Archdeaconries, Districts, Parishes, and Churches should be used for evangelism and mission (*DNDN Synod Report*, 2004). Bishop Kattey in concluding the synod preferred some clergy including this author as honorary Canons and Archdeacons. The clergy disposition in 2004 ushered Ven. Dr Emenike Chibuike Ndu (Elelenwo native, ordained in 1998). He served 2004-2006 and was succeeded by Ven. Gershon O. Wodi (also of Elelenwo).

### **Ogbakiri Church under Ikwerre Diocese**

In May 1996, the Diocese of Niger Delta North was created out of Niger Delta as stated earlier. In his last charge to the first session of the second Synod of DNDN held at St. Paul Cathedral, May 15-18, 1999, the foundation Bishop, Samuel O. Elenwo in a prayerful wish said;

- The wind of change in the Church of Nigeria (Anglian Communion) is very much on the side and soon we would be caught napping still as a single Diocese unless urgent and consistent (concerted) action is taken.
  - The Church of Nigeria was able to make an impact in the last Lambeth Conference as a result of the sizeable number of her Bishops that attended the Conference.
  - There is no doubt that very many people within and outside our diocese have been expecting that this Diocese could give birth to other Dioceses. Happily enough, the Diocese is very peaceful and stable. It is also endowed with adequate resources, material and human, that with proper sensitisation and harnessing of the available resources it can conveniently give birth to more than two new Dioceses. With this in mind, I am sure that the following groupings are appropriate and feasible.
1. Ogoni/Etche/Elemo Proposed Diocese – to comprise of the Archdeaconries of Ogoni, Etche, Elemo, Gokana and Tai.

2. Ahoada Proposed Diocese – comprise the Archdeaconries of Ahoada, Omoku and Upata.
3. Ikwerre Proposed Diocese- made up of Ikwerre, Ikwerre South and Ikwerre North Archdeaconries.

These groups have the men and women who could afford to support their Diocese to take off if appealed to. In addition, these groups have each the men and women needed for missionary services (*DNDN Synod Report 1999*. p. 50).

The answer to this prayer appeared from 2004 under the episcopacy of Bishop Ignatius C. O. Kattey. Within fourteen years the diocese gave birth to five new dioceses. They are Ahoada inaugurated July 27, 2004; Ogoni March 16, 2005; Etche March 13, 2007; Ikwerre April 20, 2007; and Evo, July 13, 2009 (Onu, 2004).

The Diocese of Ikwerre on inauguration at St Peter's Cathedral Isiokpo, comprised of the Archdeaconries of Ikwerre, Ikwerre South, and Ikwerre North. The foundation Bishop, Rt. Rev. Blessing C. Enyindah was canonically enthroned during the inauguration service presided by Most Rev Peter Jasper Akinola, Archbishop, Metropolitan, and Primate of all Nigeria (*Diocese of Ikwerre Since 2007*). This placed Ikwerre South under new episcopal leadership. The bishop in his vision to bring the Gospel, church administration and activities closer to the people, he created by fiat the Archdeaconries of Emohua, Ibaa, Igwuruta, Ndele, Ikwerre East, and Isiokpo including Odegu and Aluu as missionary (*Synod Report*, 2008). The inauguration of Emohua, Ndele, and Odegu Archdeaconries downsized Ikwerre South to comprise of Wezina group of churches. It was to be renamed "Ogbakiri Archdeaconry", but the people preferred to maintain the foundational name for historical appreciation. Thus, current Ikwerre South churches in Diocese of Ikwerre remained St Paul's Okporowo, St John's Oduoha parish, St Michael Rumuoro parish, St Clement Ahai parish, St John Rumuokani parish, and New Jerusalem church Egbelu-Oduoha. The Archdeaconry hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the 1<sup>st</sup> synod of the new diocese, April 16-19, 2009 at Okporowo.

Those who have served as chief shepherd of the Archdeaconry are Ven. Lazarus N. Nwafor, 1995-1997; Ven. Dr Emmanuel S. O. Amadi, 1997-1998; Ven. S. S.B. Ntor, 1999-2000; Ven. Dr Edmund Chike Ogwo, 2000-2004; Ven. Emenike C. Ndu, PhD, 2004-2006; Ven. Gershon O. Wodi, 2006-2008; Rev Canon Chigozie Goodlive Emesiobi, 2008-2012; Ven. D. N. W. Achinike, 2013-2014; Ven. G. U. Ordu-Emere, Esq, 2015-2017; Ven. Dr Emmanuel C. Nheeme, 2017-2019; and Ven. Chikodi J. Wachukwu, PhD, 2019-Date. Lay workers posted by the Diocese as Administrative and Accounts Clerks to support in the management are: Prince G N Chindah, 1995-1997; Mr Friday Ajor, 1997-2000; Chief Festus Poromue, 2000-2004; Mr Achinike Mgbudu, 2005-2006; Miss Joy Nwabuko, 2006-2008; Miss Goodness Osilem, 2008-2009; Miss Silver C. A. Mbato, 2009-2011; Miss Edith Ikejiri, 2011-2013; Miss Evelyn Woha, 2013-2015; Mrs Goodness Gift, 2015-2017; Mr Henry Wikpe, 2017-2019; and Mrs Chisa N. Johnson Osah, 2019-date.

Ogbakiri clergy and lay faithful holding positions of trust in the Diocese of Ikwerre include Ven. Napoleon C. Onuegbu- Archdeacon of Isiokpo/Youth Chaplain; Ven. Fortune N. Okechukwu- Archdeacon of Emohua; Ven. Dr Emmanuel Nheeme- Bishop's Admin Assist/Archdeacon St Peter's Cathedral; Ven. C. G. Emesiobi -Chaplain, Sports Ministry; Rev Christian Oziezi- Chaplain to the Archbishop/Bishop; Rev Augustine Orlukwu- Chaplain, Diocesan Administrative Staff Association; Rev Simeon S. E. Echie- Chaplain, Guild of Stewards; Sir Franklin Ajinwo, Esq- Legal Secretary; Sir Dr Nnanna V. Onyekwere- Adviser on Men's Affairs; Hon. Sam Maru- Co-ordinator, Diocesan Steward, and Sir I.K. Onyekwere- Diocesan Auditor. Among those made Knights are Sir Ejike Frank, Sir Dr Nnanna Onyekwere, Sir Ezekiel Elenwo, Sir Samuel S. Orlu, Sir Prof Bernard Onuegbu, Dame Chinyere Echomgbe, Sir Augustin Orlukwu, Sir Franklin Ajinwo, Sir Ichendu Amadi, Sir Enoch Osilem, Sir Isaac Onyekwere, Sir James Elenwo, Esq, Sir Humphrey Alikor, Dame Georgina Ben-Woke, Dame Victoria Emeji, Sir Emmanuel Worukwo, Sir Dacosta Orlu-Akwu, Sir Goodluck Emesiobi, Sir Wilberforce Worukwo, Sir Noel Elenwo, Dame Nnaemeka Orakwe, Sir Franklin Agbagbue, Sir Enyi, Sir Samuel Edeh, Dame Otannah, and Sir Michael Maru.

## CONCLUSION

The development of the Anglican Church in Ogbakiri clan of Ikwerre in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria had its CMS native church features. Though a coastal community, the church did not begin in the area until the natives took the initial step in 1895. The group and district phases appeared in 1933 and 1950 respectively with St Paul's Okporowo as headquarters. They became a rallying point for Anglican churches in Wezina, Odegu, Runderle, Emohua, and Uvahu clans. The natives entered the House of clergy in 1957, and House of Bishop in 1981, thus raising the status of the faithful to the apex Anglican house. The fifth phase came in 1995 when Ikwerre South Archdeaconry was inaugurated. The crisis that erupted in the community forced the church into captivity in 2000. They were restored two years later, and in 2007 Ogbakiri came under the Diocese of Ikwerre to the effect that churches in Ikwerre South Archdeaconry have become exclusive Ogbakiri clan. There are 23 natives in the ordained ministry and 26 made Knights in the church.

We therefore recommend that:

- i. New congregations should be opened by the church in emerging residential areas.
- ii. There should be significant investment in welfare and human development for the sustainability of the church.



- iii. Deliberate effort should be made by local churches and the Archdeaconry to invest in income yielding ventures for continuity.

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