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African Priests in the US: A Process of Reverse Missions

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Introduction

The 20th century has witnessed a profound shift take place within the core of global Christianity. Once regarded as a religion of predominance in the western world, this religion is now seeing a significant increase in membership among the world's developing countries, or global south. Rising secularism as a by-product of globalization among the global north can be seen as one cause for this transfer of Christianity's core. Nevertheless, as history demonstrates, this religion is not being transferred to unfamiliar territory, but is in many ways returning back to its roots. Of particular significance among such regions in the global south is Africa, which has been cited as the fastest-growing Christian continent in the world.¹

The effects of this shift in Christianity's centre of gravity can be seen from different perspectives in the global north and south. However one unique effect of this phenomenon is the rise and fall in numbers of clergymen, especially in the Catholic Church. Africa has been experiencing a surge in priestly ordination over the years, with seminaries often having to turn down prospective students due to the high number of applicants. This in turn has given the vocation of priesthood a highly competitive nature and a level of admiration among the African priest's society that is unheard of in Western Europe and North America. Catholic parishes in the US, on the other hand, are experiencing the contrary to Africa's vocational surge. These US parishes have been going through a deprivation of priestly vocation and are now turning to the global south for help. It is therefore becoming increasingly more common to find foreign priests working in US Catholic parishes.

Several factors that account for Christianity's exposure and transference throughout the world today are linked to colonialism, conquests for hegemonic power, and the increasing interconnectedness of a global economy. This research, however, will focus on one factor of religious missions and missionaries with regards to both the history and present state of global Christianity. An examination into the historical nature and significance of missions will set the stage for the modern phenomenon of foreign priests from the global south working in the global north. This phenomenon is referred to as "reverse-missions", as people from the developing world are now being sent to the west. To

¹ Chidester, *Christianity*, p. 537, 2000.

examine this phenomenon as well as the current state of global Christianity at a closer level, this research will implement use of an interview process among a sample of African priests who are currently working in Catholic parishes in the US. These interviews, along with an historical analysis of missions and the Catholic Church, will enable a better understanding of the “reverse-missions” process within global Christianity.

One goal of this research is to analyse a phenomenon which has a relatively limited amount of literature dedicated to it. This will hopefully open a door for future research to expand upon this topic and its implications. The most extensive and similar study to this research is Hoge and Okure’s *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities*, which was an extensive analysis of foreign-born priests serving in the US since 1985. Their research, however, was guided by the question: “Should the Catholic Church in the United States bring in more international priests?”² As remarkable this research was, it focused primarily on concerns of the Catholic Church and did not examine the concept of “reverse-missions” or mission history. This research, on the other hand, will focus specifically on Africa and the US within the realm of global Christianity and will be guided by the research question:

What are the motivational factors for African-born priests to join the priesthood and work in the US? Moreover, can they be considered as missionaries?

² Hoge and Okure, *International Priests*, 2006.

Background

The Centre for Applied Research in the Apostate reported in 1999 that there were about 7,600 foreign born priests working in the US, which was 16% of the total priests living in the US.³ Four years later, in 2003, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops reported that 28% of priests in the US were foreign born and nearly 25% of all seminarians studying in the US during 2002-2003 were not from the US. These numbers are continuing to rise in regions across the US and Africa has become one of the largest sending communities. An article in the Dallas Morning News reported that the Bigar Memorial Seminary in Nigeria is the largest Catholic Seminary in the world, enrolling more than 1,000 young men at any given time.⁴

This phenomenon is quite noteworthy for several reasons. First, there has been a shortage of American priests for some time in the US. This begs the question: Are Americans becoming less religious or less Catholic than previous years, thus straying from the often perceived “Christian Nation” legacy? Second, the receiving communities for these African priests are nearly all white English speaking (with the exception of some Spanish speaking Latino communities). The diocese selected for this research is located in East Tennessee, an area of the US known for being located in the heart of the “ultra-conservative” Bible belt, of which Southern Baptist Protestantism plays an important role in many people’s lives. Third, and the main topic for this research, is a relatively new concept called “reverse missions”. In brief, the idea of this concept is that former missionary colonies (e.g. numerous African nations today) are now sending religiously trained clergy on missions to their former religious colonizers.

³ Gaunt, p.1, 2010

⁴ Benton, *African Priests*, p. 1, 2005.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, two main methods will be applied. As this topic has significant historical implications, an historical analysis of Catholic missions in Africa will be used for the first section. The scope of this analysis will be primarily concerned with missions in the 20th century and integration of the African community into the clergy itself. The topic of religious missions in Africa is quite extensive and has an adequate amount of existing research that can be used as a foundation for this thesis' research question. Therefore, the historical analysis will focus on the advent of the Catholic Church in Africa and the development of schools of religious training (e.g. Seminaries).

The second method to be applied will be that of the interview. As this will comprise the bulk of the research, special attention will be paid to developing proper interview question templates. The sample will be taken from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee and consists of the African priests working in this diocese. If necessary (in order to generate more interviews) one of the neighbouring dioceses in Middle Tennessee or North Carolina will be used to generate more data. The interviews will be conducted in person at the respective priest's parish. A standard set of questions (at least 20) will be developed and asked to each of the interviewees focusing on the motivational (push/pull) factors of the individual that led them to become a priest and to work in the U.S. Emphasis will be placed on comparing the religious atmospheres of their receiving US communities and their native African communities. These and other carefully developed questions will help provide answers from the African priests' perspectives regarding the proposed research question.

Upon completion of the interview portion of the research, the answers will be compiled and a comparative analysis will be made regarding the collected data. Depending upon the degree of correlation for the answers given, further research will be made. For example, if a majority of priests report that they had been in the midst of civil conflict or war in their native countries, emphasis will be placed on examining the relationship between a seminarian's vocational call to priesthood and conflict within the prospective seminarian's country.

Aim of Research

The purpose of this research is to understand the desires for Africans joining the priesthood and its relation to the “reverse mission” concept. This research will also examine the relationship between current religious trends and their historical antecedents at the national and global level. At face value, this phenomenon is seen as a form of “reverse development”, in that developing countries are now sending forms of aid to the West. Therefore it is of particular interest to observe the religious boundaries such a phenomenon may transcend and cross over into the secular. Finally, this research does not intend to champion for any political or religious agenda, but rather to present a collection of material that serves to answer the questions surrounding this phenomena in as objective a manner as possible.

1 Why Study Religion?

Religion has played an important role in nearly every culture around the world throughout history. It is a universal phenomenon that has been present in every culture, often adapting itself to its environment and evolving over time, much like humans. Anthropologist and author Jared Diamond defines religion as “belief in a postulated supernatural agent for whose existence our senses cannot give us evidence, but that agent is invoked to explain things for which our senses do give us evidence.”⁵ Although this is one of many definitions of religion, it accurately describes the essential elements such as a “creator”, “god” or “supernatural agent” and the complementary “believers” or “followers”.⁶ Regardless of validity, religion serves various functions in any given society. Cohesion, social bonds, and the teaching of values are common themes among most world religions. Religion also provides an explanation of human origins and purpose for existence, often through narratives passed down over time. As religion is deeply interwoven in both the cultural and historical framework of a given society, studying religion can provide the researcher better insight and understanding of said society. Religion is a powerful global force that can be found in the architecture of a city, in language, on television, in music and film, and intertwined within the foreign relation policies of a nation.

1.1 Rationalization for selected groups of analysis

1.1.1 Priests

It is quite interesting to look at the ever increasing Latino/Hispanic population in the US and their influence on the country’s religiosity. Recent trends in US population growth point to the factor of immigration. In 2000 nearly 15% of the country’s population was foreign born, which does not include older migrant generations or illegal immigrants. With this continuing influx of migrants, they are bringing with them their culture and religion. To accommodate these needs (mainly that being language), churches are employing more

⁵ Diamond, *Evolution*, 2009.

⁶ The Catholic Encyclopedia defines Religion as “the voluntary subjection of oneself to God”. Knight, *New Advent*, 2009.

Hispanic clergy to serve the church. Thus, a rise in Hispanic priests appears to correlate with a rise in Hispanic immigrants. This is a typical case of supply and demand, as more Church services are being offered in languages other than English. However, the case with African priests in the US appears to be strikingly different than the Hispanic case. The US is not experiencing any significant type of increase in African migrants as compared to Hispanics. These African priests are not coming to the US to give “African Masses” or even to preach in any one of the hundreds of languages found in Africa. Instead, many of these African priests are preaching in suburban areas of the US in dioceses comprised of white middle-class native English speakers. The cases of Hispanic priests and African priests seem to have different causes and motivations for their vocations. With regards to the case of African priests in the US, several factors for their increase in vocation come to mind. One of these perceived factors is that there is a lack of interest in the priesthood in the US and that there is an overabundance of priests in Africa. But what variables are motivating individuals to become priests in Africa? And why is there a perceived lack of, or decline, in American born priests? Are African priests receiving more monetary compensation working in the US? What is the overall current status of religiosity in the US and Africa? Perhaps the US is losing its religious roots and following in the footsteps of secular European nations such as Sweden, Denmark, and the Czech Republic. If this is the case, can African priests be seen as some type of reverse-missionaries and the African continent no longer as a central part of the developing “third world” or “periphery”, but rather an essential agent in certain aspects of developing the “first world” or “core”? These and other questions will be examined during the process of this research in order to grasp a better understanding of this phenomenon.

1.1.2 The Catholic Church: Global Actor

As African priests in the Catholic Church will be a primary component of analysis for this research, it’s essential to develop both a definition of the Catholic Church and briefly discuss why this Church has been selected. This will thus lay the foundation for the core of this research by setting boundaries for subsequent sections and establishing an appropriate framework to meet the intended objectives.

One thing fascinating about the Catholic Church is the way in which it is perceived around the world. Catholics, non-Catholics, religious persons, and non-religious persons often maintain different views on what the Catholic Church is and the role it plays around the world. To some, the Catholic Church is synonymous with the central government

of religious leaders that comprises the Holy See in Rome, making decisions and forming policy much to the same degree as any head of state. Another viewpoint of the Catholic Church is that it is an entity comprised of individuals that adhere to a specific set of beliefs, of which provide meaning and purpose to life. These are just two of the many perceptions of what the Catholic Church is and does. Since they are perceptions formed from personal belief and opinion, it is not the purpose of this research to determine which is right or wrong. For this research, the Catholic Church is a combination of many factors and variables. These have both historical and contemporary precedents, as well as personal and pluralistic components. In a speech given to the University of California Santa Barbara for a conference to examine the global impact of the Catholic Church in 2006, Jesuit author Thomas J. Reese defined the Catholic Church as follows:

“What is the Catholic Church? For some the term is synonymous with the Pope or the Vatican. Others use the term Catholic Church to refer to the hierarchy, the Bishops and the Pope. But the Catholic Church is also all the people of God. So when we speak of the Catholic Church as a global actor, we could be referring to the Pope, the Vatican, the Bishops, Bishops conferences, organizations like Caritas and Catholic Relief Services, religious orders like the Jesuits and the Franciscans, individual Catholic diplomats, politicians, and the people in general.”⁷

Therefore, for the historical analysis pertaining to this research, I will use Reese’s definition of the Catholic Church; although this research deals primarily with parishioners and priests. For the interview section and analysis, questions pertaining to and referencing the Catholic Church will primarily be concerned with the Church hierarchical structure (Priests, Bishops, Cardinals, etc.), unless otherwise noted such as questions relating to “parishioners of the Church”. Therefore, in using Reese’s definition throughout this research, I will specify which dimension of the Catholic Church I am referring to. For purposes of both geographical convenience and overall consistency, however, I will interview priests of the Roman Catholic Rite. As this research deals with African priests, a brief overview of Christian history in Africa is essential. Therefore, the introduction of Christianity to what is now the Coptic Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches will be examined since these were unified under the See of Rome until the East-West Schism of 1054, when the church split into Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) branches (which today are known as Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic respectively). Otherwise, when not specified, the Church will refer to the collective bodies referred to above.

⁷ Reese, *Catholic Church*, 2006.

Now that there is a fixed definition of the Catholic Church for this research, it is important to note why this Church was selected. Any number of denominations adhering to the Protestant faith could have just as easily been used for this analysis. The Anglican Church and Baptist Church are two of the larger Christian faiths having global outreach. Pentecostalism represents one of the fastest growing movements within Christianity, with an estimated quarter of the world's 2 billion Christians adhering to the faith and an ever increasing majority coming from areas of the Global South such as Africa and South America.⁸ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may in fact be may be one of the world's largest and ever increasing missionary faiths. With an estimated membership of 14.1 million and growing, the LDS Church has over 50,000 active missionaries serving either full-time, part-time, over the internet, or as "service missionaries" in one of hundreds of missions around the world.⁹ Any one of these Christian faiths or conversely non-Christian faiths such as Islam or Judaism could be used for similar research. Such research regarding protestant and non-Christian faiths would make for fascinating studies to garner a better understanding of the global outreach and influences of religions in general. However, for this specific research, the Catholic Church has been carefully chosen for several advantageous reasons that are outlined below:

- 1) Historical Significance- It is the oldest Christian institution dating back to the early part of the first century CE. Missionary and colonial efforts have both been important factors in the spread of Catholic belief around the world, including Africa and the US.
- 2) Geographical Representation and Population- Owing to its long history, it is the world's largest Christian Church (1.16 billion members and growing as of 2010 according to the Vatican¹⁰) with representation on all continents, including Antarctica. It is also the largest religion in the US by population.
- 3) Organization- Through a hierarchical system of governance from the Papacy in Rome to individual Diocesan priests, the Church is able to maintain a certain level of consistency in organization and belief throughout its global outreach. Thus, selecting a random sample of two parishes in different parts of the world should produce similar results as far as clerical

⁸ Forum, *Pew Forum*, 2006.

⁹ Saints, *Statistical Report*, 2010.

¹⁰ Vatican, *Number of Catholics*, 2010.

organization and practice is concerned; albeit most likely noticeable differences in practice due to cultures.

- 4) Transnational Actor- The Church maintains diplomatic missions with nearly every country (the major exceptions being Afghanistan, Bhutan, People's Republic of China, North Korea, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Tuvalu). In addition, the Church is comprised of various institutions such as Caritas, the Society of Jesus, and The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, all of which maintain a global presence and are dedicated to various causes such as development, relief, and the promulgation of human rights.

2 The Religious Missionary

A significant portion of the Church and its history has been concerned with missions and missionary activity. Missionaries can be the embodiment of both laymen and clergy, the wealthy and destitute, and of varying educational backgrounds. As this research is predicated on the question of whether African priests are “reverse-missionaries”, a working definition and conceptual framework of the term missionary should be formed. Utterance of the word “missionary” generally invokes a religious connotation, having the all too often stereotypical image of the Western Christian travelling abroad to destitute regions in order to convert individuals not afforded the luxury of a “good Christian upbringing”. A great example of this is Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *The Poisonwood Bible*, about an evangelical Christian missionary family from the U.S. who moves to the Belgian Congo. Members of this culturally naïve family become overwhelmed by the native people’s refusal to accept both their religious and cultural habits, which leads to varying levels of conflict both within the family and their host nation.¹¹ Indeed, there are many parallels to Kingsolver’s novel and real-life missionaries, but this is one example that should not be used to generalize the overall meaning and perceived purpose of mission work. A fitting definition for missionary is, “a member of a religious group sent into an area to do evangelism or ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social justice, health care, and economic development.”¹² The Christian missionary field is in fact so vast that it has spawned its own academic field, called Missiology. Missiology is an area of practical theology that investigates the mandate, message, and work of the Christian missionary by considering both its positive and negative consequences.¹³ This academic field also examines the strategies used for spreading Christianity as well as the environmental and economic impacts of evangelization in the realm of international politics and development. Although the academic field of missiology is relatively new, the term “missionary” itself has much deeper historical roots. The word “missionary” dates back to the 16th century, in 1598, when the Jesuits sent members abroad and is derived from the Latin *missionem*, meaning “act of sending” or “to send”.¹⁴ Thus the initial usage of the term “missionary” was used solely for Jesuit Priests who

¹¹ Kingsolver, *Poisonwood*, 1998.

¹² Dictionary, *Missionary*, 2011.

¹³ Missiology, *Missions*, 2011.

¹⁴ Harper, *Mission*, 2010.

went abroad, although the concept of missionary was not a new phenomenon as it dated back to Biblical times. One specific example of a missionary act pre-dating the term “missionary” is the introduction of Christianity to Georgia by St. Nino in the 4th century. Due to her work, St. Nino has become one of the most venerated saints of the Georgian Orthodox Church today.

As stated earlier, missions have used various tactics and strategies, often giving the word “missionary” different meanings over the years. It is therefore at times problematic in defining what a missionary is. The Christian Bible contains numerous passages giving insight into the idea of missions and missionaries.¹⁵ At the same time, the terms mission and missionary in the modern age have different meanings. Religious historian Wilson B. Niwagila describes the word “mission” as a term having a variety of weight and meaning depending on the context.¹⁶ However, Niwagila’s description of a mission in a Christian context is clearly theologically bounded, but elaborates on the perspective that is often times most imperative to the missionary. This is that he or she has undertaken the respective mission work as a religious duty. According to the missionary, he or she is performing the work of God, whether it be via feeding the hungry, teaching a language, handing out free Bibles in the metro station, or numerous other types of mission work. Thus it is important to understand that the type of mission work may vary considerably, but the religious convictions of the individual are often similar; he or she is doing this work for God and commitment to the religion.

¹⁵ One such Biblical passage is Psalm 96:4,5, 10: “For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols.....say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” *Holy Bible*, 1995.

Another commonly cited passage referencing missions is Isaiah 6:8-9a: “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said ‘Here I am, send me!’ He said, ‘Go and tell this people...’” *Holy Bible*, 1995.

Also, what is referred to as The Great Commission of Jesus Christ in the book of Matthew 28:19-20 states: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Ibid.

¹⁶ “The term “mission” has been used in many circles to give a variety of meanings. As far as Christianity is concerned, the term “mission” is a vast enterprise made up of many kinds of missions and activities. From the Biblical point of view, “mission” has something to do with the salvation history. It is God himself taking the initiative by involving himself in creating a new and restoring back the lost image of humanity. God himself is the sender. He is himself a messenger and at the same time a message. In his three persons, God makes his mission realizable and effective. Through his mission (*Missio Dei*), we experience a self-giving, a self-sacrificing and self-emptying God. Through this trinity mission, God draws the entire world to himself. Man who responds positively to this mission is given the responsibility to participate in God’s mission.” Niwagila, *Missiongeschichte*, p. 50, 1996.

2.1 Main Actors

The following sections will go into greater detail regarding missions, church history, and Christianity in Africa. However, I would first like to go one step deeper into the term mission and point out a common similarity. There are generally three main actors when it comes to religious missions. The first actor is that of the sending group, which requests what type of mission should be undertaken and by whom. This could be the clergy of a Church, a charity group such as Caritas, or what the missionary believes to be an act of divine inspiration (such as the case with St. Nino, who according to legend received a vision where the Virgin Mary told her to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ).¹⁷ The second actor is that of the missionary, who actively carries out the mission given by the sending group. Examples of this could be a Jesuit Priest sent to work abroad, a young man's rite to passage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or a Church Youth group providing relief work in a country struck by natural disaster. The third actor is the receiving group, of which the mission is being enacted upon. This does not have to necessarily be a group or community, but may also be a single person. Thus the mission process is not complete without all three actors being present; cooperation and positive results are ideal but not necessary. Lastly, I would suggest this conceptualization of the mission process be viewed in a triangular relationship rather than a hierarchical one. All three parties are equally important for the mission to take place, without one of which it cannot be properly labeled a mission.

2.2 Reverse Missions

As this research will show, the concept of mission and missionary has been evolving within the Christian church for centuries. The definition of a missionary in the 16th century does not appropriately fit for a missionary in the 20th century. Thus a relatively new concept is that of "reverse missions", a product of years of missionary evolution. This "reverse flow" can be described as missionaries from third-world countries, or the global south, being sent abroad to the first-world, or global north. In many instances the respective missionaries from areas in South America and Africa are being sent to their former colonizers; although diaspora groups are also influential factors in sending these missionaries abroad. Instances of reverse missions have not been uncommon in the last 30 years, but the amazing thing is that they are

¹⁷ Crego, *St Nino*, 2011.

increasing quite significantly. In some ways, churches in the global north are in fact becoming dependent on global south missionaries (at least with respect to priestly vocations). In his paper titled *The Rhetoric of Reverse Missions: African Christianity and the Changing Dynamics of Religious Expansion in Europe*, Religious Studies Professor Afe Adogame illustrates the increase of reverse missions at the end of the 20th century:

“By the 1990s, many churches had progressed to define their missions as witnessing communities to the Western Church and societies, which were waning numerically and spiritually. In the closing decade of the 20th century, reverse missions became more recognized and gradually gained ascendancy due to economic decline and political conflicts, which intensified migration of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans to the West. Confronted by the secularization of the Western society and the decline of church attendance and public piety, these migrants took up a revivalist agenda. At the same time, these immigrant Christians looked at the Western Church as being in a state of apostasy, and in a spiritual wilderness that needed re-evangelization.”¹⁸

Another factor that has perpetuated an increase in reverse-missions for the Catholic Church has been the result of the Second Vatican Council. This ecumenical council of the Catholic Church (lasting from 1962-1965 and headed under the leadership of Pope John XXIII and closed under Pope Paul VI) addressed relations between the Church and the modern world as well as issues such as ecclesiology, liturgy, scripture and divine revelation.¹⁹ One of the many products of these issues discussed was the decree of *Ad Gentes*, or Mission Activity. This decree on missionary activity of the Church focused on various factors involved in such aspects of mission work and confirmed the need and importance for progressive development and change in this field. The decree called for development of missionary acculturation and encouraged missionaries of all types to live with the people they are attempting to convert and to absorb their culture. It also encouraged the cooperation of mission work in the Catholic Church with other external organizations and denominations. The decree additionally defines the term mission and the purpose of its implementation in certain territories.²⁰ The composition of the decree, however, is careful

¹⁸ Adogame, *South Moving*, p. 3, 2007.

¹⁹ Cheney, *Second Vatican*, 1996.

²⁰ “...the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by missionary activity and are mostly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See. The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root. Thus from the seed which is the word of God, particular autochthonous churches should be sufficiently established and should grow up all over the world, endowed with their own

not to specify the numerous delivery methods and types of missions, so as not to create any limitations. A subsequent section in the decree also presents a definition of the term “missionary” and lays out their duties and responsibilities, whether their status in the Church is as a layman or clergy.²¹

The Second Vatican Council and *Ad Gentes* decree thus promoted change in the Church and its relationship with the secular world. Missionaries were given the duty not only to spread the word of God to other nations, but also to respect and understand cultures of all backgrounds; regardless of their religiosity or lack thereof. Extensive education and training in fields of both religious and secular natures were strongly encouraged of prospective missionaries. Consequently, as a result of this change in the Church, as well as a shift in Christianity from the Global North to the Global South, the relevance of reverse-missions has both endured and intensified in the last 50 years.

maturity and vital forces. Under a hierarchy of their own, together with the faithful people, and adequately fitted out with requisites for living a full Christian life, they should make their contribution to the good of the whole Church. The chief means of the planting referred to is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Council, *Decree Ad*, 1965.

²¹ “They are assigned with a special vocation who, being endowed with a suitable natural temperament, and being fit as regards talent and other qualities, have been trained to undertake mission work; or be they autochthonous or be they foreigners: priests, Religious, or laymen. Sent by legitimate authority, they go out in faith and obedience to those who are far from Christ.” Ibid.

3 Historical Implications of Christianity in the US

Religious freedom constitutes a large portion of the American framework today, as it has in the past. The ability to express oneself freely in a religious manner is a value many Americans hold to be of utmost importance and is cited as one of the fundamental reasons explaining the early formation of early settlements in the US. To understand the significance of religion (and specifically for this research Catholicism) it is prudent to delve briefly into both the conditions and motivations of early American settlement. This will help construct a framework that lays out both the historical significance and current status of Catholicism in the US.

Although early settlers came to Jamestown in 1606 for economic pursuits of riches such as gold and other natural resources under supervision of the London Company, religion played an important role in the lives of these early settlers. As famine and disease swept through the colony in its early years killing nearly 80% of the population, settlers did not have any defense methods other than their religious convictions. In fact the initial fort built in Jamestown (appropriately named James Fort) was built on a small one acre plot of land and housed a storehouse, a church, and several houses.²² Sustenance, accommodation, and worship were thus the three fundamentals of utmost importance to the early settlers. These three fundamentals in many ways foreshadowed subsequent years of American life as this permanent settlement expanded into several colonies, then into an independent nation, and eventually into a global superpower. As stated before, however, survival was for quite some time the only goal of settlers in the first colony of the US.

After the mortality rate started to decline, the first true wave of colonists seeking religious freedom settled in New England during and after the 1630s. Protestants for reform in the Church of England, the Puritans were subjected to discrimination and in some cases punishment for their non-compliance with what they viewed as an arbitrary and unjust hierarchical ruling of the Church. Religious persecution was not exclusive to the Church of England. Catholics persecuted Protestants and Protestants persecuted Catholics for non-

²² Virginia, *History*.

conformity throughout Europe, depending primarily on the majority population. English Theologian Roger Williams denounced this form of religious imperialism and described such ideology as “enforced uniformity of religion”, which meant that a citizen’s religion was determined on the dominant majority religion and the influence of power of the state.²³

Despite coming to the New World in pursuit of religious freedom, the Puritans began to exercise the same hegemonic rule that they accused the Church of England. This initial group of some 20,000 “reformers” migrated in pursuit of mainly two goals: pursuit of religious freedom and the anticipation that the Church of England would follow suit by emulating their New World reform. The Puritans essentially felt that the Church of England was too closely in line with the Catholic Church and thus needed to be “purified”.²⁴ Such large scale migration of a predominantly homogenous religious group instead replicated the very persecution they were trying to escape. In fact the Puritans were able to create their own type of reform of the Church of England in the New World (although denounced by the Church of England) by freely practicing and believing how they saw fit. However, persecution of other religious groups shortly followed as the Puritan majority monopolized the overall democratic process. Persons in defiance of Puritan rule of law and religious belief risked capital punishment.²⁵

The notion that the US was founded on religious freedom and values is thus a problematic statement. Arguably, the country was founded on the pursuit of religious freedom and escape from religious persecution. But religious diversity and toleration were certainly a part of these founding ideologies in the initial stages of American colonialism. The New World settlers were instead able to enjoy religious freedom on the condition that they practiced the uniformity of the Puritanism.

The first wave of Roman Catholics to settle in the New World came in 1634 aboard two ships which brought them to Maryland, which was the first non-denominational colony and also the first colony to tolerate Catholics. In many ways, this settlement in Maryland was established to consolidate the inflowing Catholic minority into the New World of the overwhelming Puritan majority. As increases in non-Anglican immigrant groups (such as Quakers and Catholics) from Europe continued after this initial surge, the Maryland Toleration Act was passed in 1649 as a law mandating religious tolerance among Christians.

²³ Congress, *America*, 2010.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Acts of persecution and exclusion were prohibited in which the act stated:

“...noe person or persons...professing to believe in Jesus Christ, shall from henceforth be any waies troubled, Molested or discountenanced for or in respect of his or her religion nor in the free exercise thereof within this Province.”²⁶

This rare instance of religious tolerance in a region of intolerance was short-lived, when in 1654 the Puritan majority repealed this act of toleration, which had protected Catholics and other minority groups from religious persecution. Catholicism was outlawed and Catholic priests were exiled to discontinue preaching.²⁷ Other strict laws enforced by the Puritan majority restricted Catholics the right to vote, hold office, or worship publicly. Consequently, Catholics and other religious groups such as Quakers and German Baptists remained a small minority with restricted rights among an ever increasing majority.

3.1 Priests as Missionaries

As Catholicism was a minority religion often being not tolerated by the Protestant majority, Catholic Priests played unique roles in the early American Catholic Church. In the year 1780, for example, it has been cited that in Maryland there were only 19 priests for nearly 16,000 Catholics. States such as Pennsylvania and New York also had a disproportional number of priests to parishioners.²⁸ These numbers included priests who were over seventy years of age, making the labor force of priests incapable of serving parishioners in every community. Thus due to the high demand and low supply of clergy, Catholic priests became missionaries in their own land. John Carroll, whom in 1789 was appointed as the first Catholic bishop for the United States, was one of the many priests who were constantly travelling during this time. Carroll's congregation was in the city of Baltimore, but he often had to ride 25 or 30 miles to the sick. In addition, Carroll would travel once a month between 50 and 60 miles to another congregation in Virginia, spending a great deal of time away from home.²⁹ Historian James O'Toole gives a detailed example of one priest's wide missionary circuit along the east coast:

“He arrived in Savannah from Charleston one January, for instance, and was told that the last time a priest had visited there was the previous October. As a

²⁶ Hanley, *Church History*, 1957.

²⁷ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 2002.

²⁸ O'Toole, *The Faithful*, p. 29, 2008.

²⁹ Ibid. p 14.

result, he had a lot to do. He celebrated Mass every day, and the local Catholics took advantage of his presence to attend services that had otherwise been unavailable. Twelve people received Communion his first morning in town (a Saturday), twenty-seven the next day, and fifteen over the next two days. He spent hours hearing from the parishioners' confessions, and he administered the sacrament of confirmation to fifteen. On the following Wednesday, he left Savannah aboard the 4 am stage for Augusta, arriving two days later- "the first day very wet, the second excessively cold." There, the routine was the same: thirty Communion, almost fifty confirmations, uncounted numbers of confessions. Two days later, it was on to the town of Warrenton, then to Wilkes County, then to Locust Grove, before he finally retraced his steps slowly back to Charleston, where he arrived a full month after setting out."³⁰

Other accounts such as this were commonplace for Catholic priests in America during a time when the laity population was experiencing considerable growth. This young nation was comprised of numerous immigrant communities, primarily from Europe, and often non-English speaking. Therefore, French and German speaking priests would also travel along the Catholic circuit, servicing as many religiously neglected communities as possible during their journeys. The Church would eventually benefit in overall sustainability from such travelling circuit priests. The immigrant Catholic population eventually became firmly rooted in the surrounding culture and regarded this land as their own. For many children of such immigrants, joining the priesthood was a practical decision, both economically and spiritually. Priests were regarded with a sense of honor and dignity, revered in many ways as types of community leaders and role models. James O'Toole describes the advantages of joining the clergy in a time full of uncertainties:

"The church also offered opportunity. The sons and daughters of immigrants became priests and nuns in numbers previously unimagined, and their vocations gave them and their families advantages in this world as well as the next one. They earned advanced degrees at a time when education was still a luxury, and they achieved a kind of elite status in the community."³¹

This passage, cited by O'Toole as motivational factors for persons joining the clergy, in many ways echoes the situation in present day Africa. This will be discussed in more depth in an upcoming chapter, but should be noted to keep in mind that there appears to be similarities between early America (18th – 19th centuries) and present day Africa when it comes to motivational factors for joining the priesthood. It should also be noted that Christianity in both Africa and America during these respective time-spans has been in a similar phase of development. However, further observation regarding this topic will follow in an upcoming chapter.

³⁰ O'Toole, *The Faithful*, p. 15, 2008.

³¹ Ibid. p. 96.

3.2 Catholic Origins

Determining the origins of a migrant group can be a quite daunting task, as it is often a non-linear process. The history of the Catholic Church in the US is no exception and brings forth several questions to the researcher. Should the researcher begin by analyzing the first persons to set foot in the New World whom followed the Catholic faith? If so, one could trace the origins of the Catholic Church in the US back to the origins of Christianity in the New World, as these would be a homogenous incident. Timothy Matovina confirms this view by tracing the arrival of Christianity in the US with the Spanish expeditions into the area, such as Juan Ponce de Leon's famous excursions into Florida. He goes on to illustrate that "Spanish subjects established settlements there in order to stake territorial claims for the Spanish crown, pursue economic gain, and to propagate Catholicism among native populations."³² In fact, these instances were the first cases of Catholic missionaries in what was to become the US. These missionaries (usually Franciscan friars) accompanied de Leon and other exploratory expeditions in the New World and were an integral part of Spanish efforts to establish settlements. The main purpose of these missionaries was the conversion of the indigenous populations through temporary institutions in order to prepare them to become "good Spanish subjects".³³ Another starting point the researcher could use to map Catholic history in the US could also be the first steady inflow of Catholics who established a permanent settlement not for reasons of conquest. This would correlate appropriately with the aforementioned group of Catholic immigrants to settle in Maryland in the 1600s. A small minority population for quite some time, this group relied on survival through reproduction and small inflows of fellow Catholic immigrants in later years. The most commonly cited starting point for US Catholic history, however, is undoubtedly the massive wave of Irish immigrants in the 1800s due to the potato blight. This process of migration lasted from the mid-1830s to at least 1880s and saw the transplantation of both an ethnic and religious group to a foreign land, the results of which can still be seen today throughout the US and especially areas of New England. Prior to the Irish arrival, the American Church was still largely a homogenous center with traces of slight deviation along the periphery. When the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, Catholics comprised scarcely one percent of the population.³⁴ In addition to Irish immigrants in the

³² Matovina, *US Catholic*, 2010.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

1830s was a smaller, yet still significant, arrival of German Catholics coming primarily from Bavaria.³⁵

Both German and Irish Catholics came to the New World with a set of deeply ingrained religious habits and traditions, which remained steadfast even among the Protestant majority. Historian James O'Toole notes that before these waves of immigration, it was uncommon to gather data about church membership because the separation of church and state blocked census takers from asking such questions. However, this new pattern became easy to observe:

“Catholics accounted for only about 3 percent of the nation in 1830, but by 1850 that number was already up to 8 percent. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Catholic Church had become the largest single religious denomination in the country, though it was still outnumbered if all the distinct Protestant churches were counted together.”³⁶

The Catholic Church was no longer a mere peripheral group among a Protestant core. Instead, this process had created two cores, with the Catholic core beginning to overtake the Protestant in numbers. The Protestant core would continue to experience numerous political privileges not afforded to Catholics (such as the right to vote). The American religious landscape continued to develop well into the end of the 19th century as Catholics made up 18 percent of the population, which in the 1920s rose to nearly 21 percent.³⁷

The aforementioned section demonstrates that mapping American Catholic history is a lengthy process of contentious origin. A linear historical understanding of the American Catholic Church thus creates limitations resulting in unwanted oversight. One obvious problem with such a linear framework creates the illusion that the Catholic Church in Europe was a single cultural entity that was able to construct a uniform church of new world immigrants. Although members of the Catholic Church did adhere to the same set of beliefs and would undoubtedly consider themselves of the same faith, these immigrant groups still came from vastly different cultures. Language was most likely the strongest of these cultural variables. The Germans, Spanish, and Irish may have indeed been the same Catholics by practice, but language and cultural differences separated them into distinct diaspora groups that prevented the American Catholic Church from initially forming into

³⁵ “German Catholics had not experienced a revival as intense as that of the Irish, but they had lived through the harsh policies of Bismarck, who had declared *Kulturkampf* against the church, limiting the public role of the clergy and restricting Catholic schools.” O'Toole, *The Faithful*, p. 37, 2008.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

one strong religio-political entity similar to the Puritans of England. Charles Morris suggests somewhat of an alternative to such linear historical thinking by analyzing different historical patterns of the Catholic Church:

“The Church post U.S. independence was a republican church, which expanded into an immigrant Church in the 19th and 20th centuries, and then post WWII to when JFK was elected, which signaled a full-on acceptance of American Catholicism.”³⁸

Morris’s historical view of the American Catholic Church, divided into a series of waves, seems more appropriate than the all too common linear methodology. However, this approach limits itself by analyzing the Church’s post-independence and therefore disregards the existence of Catholicism before 1776. Although an ever present minority group even before the 1800s, it is important to recognize that the Catholic Church’s establishment and growth in America was not a sudden development due to potato famine in Europe, but rather a series of numerous historical events. I would therefore propose to view this as an ongoing historical process comprised of numerous events, or stages of development, that often overlap but are nevertheless part of a single American Catholic historical framework. Spanish New World conquest, initial Catholic settlement in Maryland, and various Catholic diaspora minorities should supplement Morris’s “republican” church, “immigrant” church, and post-JFK “church of acceptance”. Together, this set of six stages or waves lays a more appropriate historical framework when analyzing the Catholic Church in the US.

3.3 Catholicism Today

The Catholic Church has grown to the single largest religious denomination in the US today. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in 2009 there were over 68,000,000 Catholics in the US, or 22% of the country’s population. These numbers continue to grow with new converts as well as more than 830,000 infant baptisms each year. Adult baptisms totaled more than 42,000 and the number of persons received into full communion was just under 73,000.³⁹ These statistics concerning the laity of the Roman Catholic Church can be found spread across 195 archdioceses/dioceses, which are comprised of 145 Latin Catholic dioceses, 33 Latin Catholic archdioceses, 15 Eastern Catholic dioceses, 2 Eastern Catholic archdioceses, and 1 apostolic exarchate for the Syro-

³⁸ Morris, *National Catholic*, 2003.

³⁹ USCCB, *Catholic Church*, 2009.

Malankara Catholic Church (7 of the 195 dioceses were currently vacant). The number of priests working in the US in 2011 was 40,271 (27,284 diocesan priests and 12, 978 religious-order priests such as Jesuits and Dominicans).⁴⁰ In addition to the current priests, there are 5,247 seminarians enrolled in the US (3,394 enrolled in diocesan seminaries and 1,853 enrolled in religious-order seminaries). Other noteworthy clerical statistics include 18 US cardinals, 270 active bishops, 61,763 vowed religious brothers and sisters, and 17,436 permanent deacons.

The influence of the Catholic Church in the US goes well beyond its clergy and parishes previously mentioned. Institutions such as universities and colleges, parochial schools, healthcare systems, and charities make the church's organizational presence all the more vibrant. According to 2010-2011 reports, Catholic elementary and high school enrollment totaled 2,065,872 students (5,774 elementary schools and 1,206 high schools), while colleges and universities numbered 235 institutions educating 804,826 students.⁴¹ Most US cities of considerable size have at least one Catholic hospital or health care center, with the total number of such hospitals totaling 554 (treating 89,501,723 patients annually), other health care centers numbering 357 (treating 5,535,260 patients annually), and 1,541 specialized homes (assisting 1,031,215 residents annually).⁴² Lastly, the same report said in 2009 that the social services of the church totaled more than 2,391 local Catholic Charities agencies and institutions, all of which provided various services to 9,164,981 unduplicated individuals in need of help.⁴³

With regard to the aforementioned statistics, it is obvious that the geographical outreach and presence of the Catholic Church in the United States is substantial when compared to other religions and their respective institutions. On the global scale, the United States has the fourth largest Catholic population, after Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines. A poll regarding US Catholic demographics found the church's ethnicity to be 60% non-Hispanic white (mostly Irish, Italian, German, and Polish), 31% Latino of any race, 4% Black, and 5% other ethnicities (primarily Filipino, Asian-American, and American Indians).⁴⁴ Owing largely to the increase in US Catholic Church members is the ever increasing migrant Latino communities. A 2010 study on Latino Catholics in the US confirms this statement:

⁴⁰ USCCB, *Catholic Church*, 2009.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Paulson, *Boston*, p. 1, 2008.

Between 1990 and 2008, there were 11 million additional Catholics. The growth in the Latino population accounted for 9 million of these. They comprised 32% of all American Catholics in 2008 as opposed to 20% in 1990.⁴⁵

The US Catholic Church has been shaped and influenced by a variety of factors. Migration flows of various immigrant communities have been perhaps some of the most distinct variables that have woven the fabric of the church in this country. Each community has played a role in the development and overall progression of the church by contributing ideas and cultural identity through the respective community's church members. A second variable that is often overlooked when it comes to early US Church history is the role of missions and missionaries in the Church's sustainability and development. As stated previously in this chapter, travelling circuit priests coming from various European countries were commonplace, especially at a time when there was such a high demand for Catholic priests but a conversely limited supply. Some similarities can be drawn between this time in early US history and the present state of the US Catholic Church, mainly being that foreign priests have supplemented a lack of domestic vocation. However, these two periods of foreign priestly vocations in the US have notable dissimilarities. The example given of the travelling circuit priest in the 18th-19th centuries (and any other time period before the late 20th century) is one of a sort of "top-down" or "traditional" mission, in being that individuals from the economic and politically dominant global north were travelling to the "underprivileged" and "politically weak" developing regions in the New World. The present case is exactly the opposite, in that priests from the economically poorer and politically weaker global south such as Africa are coming to serve in the economically and politically dominant global north. Has the core of global Christianity shifted once again from Western Europe and North America to South America, Asia, and Africa? Or do these present day foreign priests have other motivations for their priestly vocations in the US? These questions along with others will be addressed in the following chapters outlining Christianity in Africa, priest shortages, and the interview section where first-hand accounts and experiences of African priests working in the US will be analyzed. The next chapter will help connect these topics by analyzing the current state of religion in Africa, the African historical narrative of Christianity, and also the various types of missions and missionaries who, like the aforementioned US missions, have promulgated varying degrees of influence on the current state and development of Africa's present-day religious landscape and in many ways continue to do so.

⁴⁵ Zapor, *Florida Catholic*, p. A11, 2010.

4 Africa: Historical Implications of Christianity

“In our time there has been much allusion to the marginalization of Africa, following the end of the Cold War era. However, in one particular aspect, Africa will not be marginalized. That one area is the field of Christian theology and Christian religious scholarship generally.” – Kwame Bediako

One of the main questions which has arisen repeatedly throughout the course of this research and also pertains directly to the research question is: Why has there been such a significant call to the priesthood in Africa? The interview section and analysis of this research will attempt to answer this question by speaking directly to and hearing from active African priests. However, behind the aforementioned question of “why” lies another underlying and equally important question of “how”, namely: How has Christianity been able to make such an influential impact within Africa? This question will be addressed briefly in the interview portion of this research, mainly regarding Christianity in Africa within the last century. But in order to more accurately address and answer this question of “how”, a more detailed look into African Christianity and its origins is essential. Gathering essential background information from African priests and analyzing this data will help illuminate the current state of the Catholic religion in Africa.

The history of Christianity in Africa is a multifaceted non-linear process, in many ways similar to the introduction of Christianity in the US. What is now the current state of Africa’s religious atmosphere is the product of two millennia, comprised of the interactions of multiple ethnicities, countries, empires, and cultures. Such interactions include aspects of migration, war, colonial rule, missions, economy and other social forces often having dramatic influence on a given cultures politics and religion. Africa has a vast cultural landscape.⁴⁶ Each country in Africa has its own unique history, set of languages, and cultural traditions that set it apart from the others. Therefore, the penetration of Christianity into these uniquely different cultures has been the product of various approaches and strategies; these being both praised and denounced over the years. Such a dynamic history could

⁴⁶ The continent of Africa currently contains 54 sovereign states (which also include Madagascar and other additional islands) and over 2,000 spoken native languages.

easily yield its own research and comprise numerous books. The purpose of this section will be to understand the dynamic historical nature of Christianity in Africa via the various methods. Special attention will be paid to the history of and influence of missions. Doing so will provide a thorough understanding of the continent's current religious atmosphere. This will likewise provide an understanding of the growing African priesthood, which will be discussed to a greater extent in subsequent chapters.

4.1 Historical Periods of Christianity's Development in Africa

In the previous chapter on Catholicism in the US, special attention was paid to immigration patterns of Catholics and other religious groups using a non-linear approach of historical patterns, rather than a traditional linear approach. As Africa's religious history is arguably more complex and dynamic than the US's relatively young historical narrative, a similar method of approach will be used. Although the numerous African societies have experienced many approaches and strategies in the establishment, or "planting", of Christianity in their given societies, a more comprehensive set of time periods detailing the fluctuating nature of African Christianity will be used. These are three periods which are found in the author Wilson B. Ninaglia's *African Church History and Mission History* and titled⁴⁷:

1. The Planting of Christianity in the First Six Centuries.
2. A New Attempt in Christianizing Africa: Imperialism and Mission Making: 1500-1800.
3. The Modern Period: The Third Encounter 1800-1960.

The methods of Christianity's dissemination during these three periods varied and were often the products of a given civilization's political landscape and rule. However, an often overlooked similarity shared within all three periods is the presence of missionaries and missions. This similarity may in fact only be shared in the name, as the word "missionary" has changed both in concept and definition over the last two millennia.

⁴⁷ Niwagila, *Missiongeschichte*, 1996.

4.1.1 The First Six Centuries

The first six centuries for the Church in Africa were somewhat of a trial phase which essentially tested the strength and durability of this new religion. Initially a sect of Judaism, early Christians were regarded as cult members and heretics under the Roman Empire. Persecution was commonplace among those proselytizing and practicing the new religion. Animosity towards Christians rose from the belief that proper "piety" to the Roman gods helped to sustain the well-being of the cities and their people, as well as maintain a sense of unity among Roman citizens. Additionally, such early Christian practices of "eating the flesh" and "drinking blood" were acts that aroused suspicions of cannibalism and other immoral acts, which contributed to the group's cult status.⁴⁸ The spread of early Christianity thus depended greatly on the individual missionary efforts of devout followers who proselytized to civilizations foreign to these new beliefs. The writing of manuscripts, translation of religious text, and word of mouth were common mediums of the religions dispersal during this early period. These acts were not without consequence, as many devout missionaries became martyrs for their beliefs and attempts in spreading the geographical reach of this new religion.

These missionary efforts and religious devotion in the face of persecution contributed greatly to the spread of the new faith into neighboring continents. Thus, the Catholic Church has had a long established presence in the African continent, often wavering in degrees of intensity. Christianity in Africa can be traced as far back as the middle of the first century in Egypt, where the Coptic Orthodox Church continues to be the largest Christian group in that country. The Church maintains through tradition that Mark the Evangelist travelled to Egypt after the ascension of Christ and subsequently established the Church of Alexandria, essentially marking the introduction of Christianity to Africa in the first century.⁴⁹ Additionally, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church traces its historical lineage to the proselytizing of Phillip the Evangelist, who on his way travelling south to Gaza from Jerusalem baptized a man who was a eunuch from Ethiopia.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁸ Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 2007.

⁴⁹ Luke 10:1 (NIV) "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go." The Coptic Orthodox Church holds tradition in identifying Mark the Evangelist as one of these 72. *Holy Bible*, p. 807, 1995.

⁵⁰ Acts 8:26-28 "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road- the desert road- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet." Several

Ethiopian Orthodox Church cites this Biblical event as the primary catalyst of the dynamic Christian tradition in Ethiopia which has flourished well into the 21st century.

A great deal of missionary efforts and expansion in Africa were due to the work of church leaders. One example of this was the translation of the Bible by missionaries into the Ge'ez language spoken by citizens in the region of what is now Ethiopia. In 330 AD, the Ethiopian-King Eneza was converted and subsequently made Christianity the official state religion, of which he was supreme religious authority.⁵¹ By the year 400 AD Christianity had gained a significant foothold on the African continent. According to some sources, in the 5th century North Africa was home to 500 dioceses and 3,500 churches, which represented 20% of the world's Christian population.⁵² A primary objective for missionaries during this critical period of early Christian growth was the survival of what was seen by many as a religious cult. Survival of the church was best facilitated via the conversion of equally educated and influential individuals such as kings and nobility whom had direct influence on the peasant class.

Africa has become quite influential on the stage of global Christianity in the past 100 years, especially regarding the increase in priests within the Catholic Church. However, Africa before the 7th century can be viewed in certain ways as a more influential regional power than it is today. This may be largely due in fact to the geographical extent of Christianity during this time. This religion had successfully endured and managed to penetrate the Roman Empire and spread as far west as Great Britain and as far east as India. North Africa and its surrounding regions saw a geographical advantage as being in one of the centers of early Christianity. This can be seen as somewhat of a "high-traffic" area which was exposed to various exchanges of communication of early Christian thinkers and missionaries. One interesting thing that is quite often either overlooked or forgotten about the Church regarding Africa during this period, is that Africa possessed an important role early on in ecclesiastical leadership. By ecclesiastical leadership, this includes of course bishops and priests, but more interestingly during this time there were the first three (and so far only) Popes who hailed from Africa.⁵³ Although Christianity began to flourish in the region of North Africa

verses later, after speaking together about the passage in of scripture, the man asked Philip to baptize him. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church uses this account to trace the initial introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia. *Ibid.* pp. 853-854, 1995.

⁵¹ Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 2007.

⁵² Niwagila, *Missiongeschichte*, 1996.

⁵³ Pope Victor I (c. 189-199), Pope Miltiades (c. 311-314), and Pope Gelasius I (492-496) were all born in Roman Africa.

during this period, it was short-lived as the Muslim conquests from 647-709 all but nearly wiped out the far-reaching influence of Christianity in that region.⁵⁴

4.1.2 Imperialism and Mission Making

Subsequent to the first 600 years of Christianity and until the Age of Discovery, the Muslim conquests left much of Africa barren of Christianity. A monumental shift in the center of Global Christianity had therefore taken place and the new stronghold of Christianity and global power was now Europe. The terms missionary and colonizer had in many ways become synonymous, as discovery and exploration were regarded by western powers such as Portugal and Spain as callings to serve God and Church. Thus the conversion and therefore “civilization” of indigenous peoples in North America, South America, and Africa were essential to the colonization process. There was of course a very important underlying secular element to the conversion of indigenous peoples, which would through the process of Christianization yield “civilized” individuals who were both loyal and obedient to the respective crown. Historian Lamin Sanneh confirms this fact of intertwined Church/Empire imperialism through a more detailed example:

“Portugal became the first European sea-based power to colonize extensively in Africa. These Portuguese maritime expeditions (mainly in search of mercantile interests) brought with them priests, many of whom viewed the explorations as a continuation of the Christian Crusades.”⁵⁵

Although the concept of Church/Empire was a prevalent missionary method during the Age of Discovery, other tactics were used to spread Christianity. In fact the Catholic Church started to take an active role in pursuing missionary paths in Africa through diplomatic relations.⁵⁶ The Papacy established official relations with Ethiopia in 1451 once the Pope sent official representatives there. Also during this time the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) were founded by Ignatius of Loyola as a religious order of priests who followed the teachings of the Catholic Church.⁵⁷ The Jesuits arrived in Africa during the middle of the 16th century where they formed Christian villages. In 1596 the Papacy established the Diocese of São Salvador in what was the Kongolese Kingdom and

⁵⁴ Niwagila, *Missiongeschichte*, 1996.

⁵⁵ Sanneh, *Disciples*, p. 90, 2008.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 94.

⁵⁷ Formed in 1534.

the neighboring territory of Angola.⁵⁸ Jesuits eventually established colleges in this and other regions as part of their missionary work in Africa, often using these colleges and villages located on the coast as central hubs to support their future missionary efforts that would penetrate into deeper regions of Africa's interior.⁵⁹ Thus we see in this second period of African Christianity that the dispersal of this religion via both colonial powers and missionaries (at times often undistinguishable) had both secular and religious objectives. In contrast with Christianity's introduction to Africa in the first 600 years AD, this religion became more often used as a political tool for the economic and geographical gain of colonial powers. However, this was also a time of resurgence of a religion that had become a minority in a land it once dominated. Imperialism and mission making had opened more doors for Christianity's resurgence by transcending the traditional Apostolic Age of proselytism with new mediums of diffusion.

4.1.3 The Modern Period

The most recent period of African Christianity is the shortest but perhaps the most complex. Prior to the beginning of this period, in the 18th century, many missionary causes had either ceased to exist or begun to dramatically decline in numbers. Lamin Sanneh cites that the essential reasons for this rapid decline in missions were, "due to the decline of the Portuguese Empire, distrust of African Kings towards Westerners, civil war, social devastation caused by the slave trade, countries becoming independent, and a lack of priests for such a large territory."⁶⁰ A changing political landscape had greatly influenced the overall religious atmosphere of much of Africa. Therefore, from the 1800s onwards new strategies and methods were used by Protestants and Catholics alike to both evangelize and Christianize Africa. Detachment from colonialism and the slave trade of western missions were essential for Christianity to survive and not be viewed as an imperialistically imposed religion. This new wave of missionary renewal spawned influential groups during this time such as the London Missionary Society (1795), Netherlands Missionary Society of Rotterdam (1797), Mission School in Berlin (1800), Basel School (1815), and the Church Missionary Society (1799). These groups, along with others, took a new approach to the work of missionaries by becoming more actively involved with social justice in Africa. Many of

⁵⁸ Ruins of the Cathedral built there in 1549 lie on the border of present day Angola and Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many Angolans claim this to be the oldest church in Sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵⁹ Sanneh, *Disciples*, p. 100, 2008.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 103.

these new missionary groups and churches from the West renounced imposing their civilization and ways of life on non-Western Christians by enabling them to develop their own forms of Christianity.⁶¹ Examples of this can be seen in Catholic Churches in Africa where Mass is celebrated with traditional instruments and song endemic to the respective culture. Wilson B. Niwagila names five new common methods and strategies for missions used by Catholics and Protestants alike during this modern period:⁶²

- 1) Education
- 2) Medical Work
- 3) New Christian Communities or Christian Villages
- 4) Legitimate Trade
- 5) Conversion of Kings and Chiefs

These new methods and strategies had begun to pay off as the Church was focusing on the needs of a given country and not just conversion. An already existing African Christian population coupled with the Church's newfound social justice tactics created a positive atmosphere for the religion's growth. The end of the 19th century was similarly an important step forward for the church in Africa as black Africans were starting to become ordained. In the 1890s, for example, Roman Catholic missionaries in Uganda had started to make their own converts and African clergy were being ordained.⁶³ Also in 1887 the first black South African Catholic priest was ordained, just one year after the first African-American priest was ordained in the U.S. These instances of priest ordination were followed by many more, which took place at the beginning of the 20th century when the Catholic population in Africa was 1.9 million. Philip Jenkins remarks that "a hundred years later, in the year 2000, Catholic population in Africa had grown to 130 million, a growth rate of 6,708%, the most rapid expansion of Catholicism on a single continent in the 2000 years of Church history."⁶⁴ Today, Africans account for 1/8 of the world's Catholics, and by 2025, it is projected that the 230 million African Catholics will represent 1/6 of all members of the church worldwide.⁶⁵

Although Christianity was brought to Africa in many areas via missions, these cultures have in turn embraced this religion and adapted it to their own needs, thus making Christianity an African religion with its own distinct characteristics. Therefore I would argue that Africa is not

⁶¹ Sanneh, *Disciples*, p. 105, 2008.

⁶² Niwagila, *Missiongeschichte*, 1996.

⁶³ Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 2007.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

simply the victim of religious colonialism and imperialism because this process has been much more than simply a product of decades of imperial rule. The previous sections corroborate this fact stating that colonialism did indeed have a significant impact on the religious atmosphere in Africa, but also a myriad of other influential variables occurring both before and after. Religious historian Lamin Sanneh sums up the history of Christianity beautifully by saying that it's a movement deeply embedded in historical and ever-evolving traditions and cultures, with a series of "origins", expansion and subsequent attrition in various parts of the world.⁶⁶ The last century of Christian growth in Africa and the subsequent shift from global north to south is therefore in many ways a return to the religion's roots.⁶⁷ Thus it is apparent that the current state of African priesthood has been shaped by numerous internal and external variables.

⁶⁶ Sanneh, *Disciples*, 2008.

⁶⁷ Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 2007.

5 The Priest Shortage

In previous chapters of this research, the Catholic Church has been compared, examined, and considered as a type of transnational organization. This organization has influence and outreach on a global level. Its history, origins, development, and continuing sustainability were the focus of the chapters on Africa and the US. To continue with this transnational organization approach, this chapter will focus on priestly employment, or lack thereof. Although the Catholic Church and Christianity in general appear to be moving South, there still continues to be a demand for both in the North. However, when looking at the Catholic Church's decreasing employment rate among priests, an initial assumption is that both the Church and Christianity are on the decline. Is the Global North conceding to an age of secularism that has no need for organized religion? What is the future for this organization? Or are there other underlying variables that have been overlooked at first glance? These and other similar questions will be analyzed in this chapter examining the decreasing employment rate of priests in the Catholic Church.

Before focusing solely on the Catholic Church, a glimpse into the overall religious atmosphere in the US will help put things into a better perspective. As the title of this chapter alludes, the Catholic Church is experiencing a decline in priestly ordination. Protestant churches, on the other hand, are experiencing a quite different phenomenon in the US. According to a 2010 news article, for example, the Presbyterian Church has four ministers for every opening and according to official church data there are 532 vacancies for 2,271 ministers seeking positions.⁶⁸ Similar clerical surpluses are also present in The Assemblies of God, United Methodist Church, Church of the Nazarene, and other Protestant denominations. According to the latest Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches there are now almost two ministers for every church, or more precisely 607,944 ministers and 338,713 congregations.⁶⁹ Reasons for such a surplus of ministers in Protestant churches are primarily economic. Due to an economic recession, parishioners are becoming more frugal and thus giving less to their respective churches, resulting in staff cuts and leaving an overwhelming number of clergy unemployed. Additionally, a large number of Protestant churches in the US are comprised of quite small

⁶⁸ Warner, *Huffington*, 2010.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

congregations, often 100 parishioners or less. Therefore, when comparing such churches to small businesses, there is a relatively small income generated from such low numbers. Ministers with their own bills to pay (often including debt from seminary and university) and families to support are often less inclined to seek employment at such a small institution, in hopes for a job with a larger congregation. Non-hierarchical churches such as Baptists, Pentecostals, and many other evangelical groups are even tougher to track, but research states that clergy glut is even worse in such loose-knit denominations, thus offering little job security.⁷⁰ There are certainly other variables as to the overabundance of protestant clergy; however the most outstanding one across the entire “playing-field” of the US is economic in nature.

The state of clergy and overall religious atmosphere in the US Catholic Church is going through a rather unique and different phenomenon when compared to US Protestant denominations. This is because Catholicism in the US is experiencing growth in membership but a shrinking priesthood; seemingly the opposite is true of the case with Protestant denominations. One study illustrates this by examining the absolute number of American Catholics between the years 1925 and 1980. During this time the total number of Catholics grew from fewer than 20 million to more than 50 million. National polls indicate several factors for this increase in Church growth: (1) a high fertility rate and (2) the influx of Hispanic and Asian immigrants.⁷¹ The clergy population, on the other hand, has been experiencing a decline and is continuing to do so. Priestly ordinations in the US saw 47% less men ordained during the 1980-84 period than during the 1966-69 period.⁷² The same study observed that in 1993, for every 10 priests who left the active ministry for any number of reasons (such as resignation, sick leave, or death) only 6 newly ordained priests were taking their places. This means that for every 10 vacant positions in the priesthood, 4 are going unfilled.⁷³ The study also examined and reported on the geographic areas affected by the decline in priestly ordination in the US.⁷⁴ The absolute number of priests working in the US has continued to decline through the end of the 20th century and well into 2010. The total number of Catholic priests in the US in 2010 was 39,993

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Schoenherr and Young, *Full Pews*, p. 5, 1993.

⁷² Ibid. p. 148.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 288.

⁷⁴ “The clergy population is steadily decreasing and aging, more rapidly in one half of the country than the other. Diocesan presbyteries in the Northeast and North-central divisions are declining by almost 50% compared with only a 15-20% decline for those in the South and West. The number of parishioners per priest is relentlessly growing, much more swiftly in the West than elsewhere.” Ibid. P. 117.

compared to 49,054 priests in 1995. According to The Official Catholic Directory, the US Catholic population in 2010 was 65.6 million members, almost 10 million more than the 1995 population of 57.4 million.⁷⁵ These trends clearly show that the US Catholic Church is undergoing a growth in parish population and a steady decline in priests. How can such numbers, which clearly contradict Protestant denominational statistics, be explained?

There are several explanations and variables that have shaped what is now the current state of the US Catholic Church. A combination of social, demographic, and historical factors should be cited to explain the increase in laity and decrease in clergy. It is therefore important to continue to view the Catholic Church as an organization and realize that the vitality of organized religion is not just a function of the size and growth of church membership, but also the strength of its internal organization as a product of human capital.⁷⁶ The ongoing priest shortage is due to various interactions with other social preconditions for structural transformation. Schoenherr and Young cite 6 dialectical processes closely related to the priest shortage:

- 1) Changing demographics
- 2) A decline in dogmatism and a rise in pluralism
- 3) Secularization trends and the end of colonialism have transformed the predominately European or Western church into a world church, with its center of gravity shifting to the Southern Hemisphere.
- 4) Doctrinal changes legitimated by the Second Vatican Council represent a major transitional force.
- 5) The feminist movement, especially among nuns and laywomen in church-related careers is eroding male hegemony over the church's ministry and establishing a growing sense of female equality.
- 6) The ordained clergy's political monopoly over the technical core of the church's ministry is being called into question by increased lay participation in ministerial roles.⁷⁷

The research uses these six statements as explanatory factors as to why there is an ongoing fall in priestly ordination. However, in my opinion, these factors fail to examine the economic factors of priestly employment and church membership, as did the previous Protestant denomination cases. Can salary be a factor in low priest ordination in the US? Is salary therefore a factor for foreign priests moving to work

⁷⁵ University, *Center*, 2010.

⁷⁶ Schoenherr and Young, *Full Pews*, p. 5, 1993.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 3-4.

in the US? These questions will be explored in the interview section of this research. A final note to make on the factor of influence in the priesthood, and certainly not least important, is the historical element. Christianity has gone through some major developments and changes over its two millennia of existence. Time yields change, and with the change is evolution. There are many theologians who would agree that such evolution is necessary for the survival of the church. Without the Church accepting or acknowledging various social and secular processes over time, the Catholic Church may very well not have been able to sustain itself and continue to grow. Does this mean that some type of internal structural change should be made in order to accommodate the various social processes affecting priests? The answer to this question steps beyond the limitations of this research, but is still posed to encourage creative thought and concede to the fact that both the church and priesthood are influenced by internal and external factors, both religious and secular in nature. The following excerpt from Schoenherr and Young's research sums up these issues rather bluntly:

"A variety of political, economic, environmental, and organizational conditions has affected the demography of the Catholic priesthood over the centuries. Certain ecological conditions such as disease, famine, and migration patterns have inevitable and universal demographic consequences, sparing no population sub-groups including the clergy. Some environmental factors, involving the interaction of organized religion with other institutions in society, however, may focus more specifically on religious leaders. Thus during revolutions and wars tied to religious disputes, hostile forces have intentionally singled out the clergy for assassination."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Schoenherr and Young, *Full Pews*, p. 8, 1993.

6 Interviews

“If there is anything that I value in my life it is my priesthood. And I will die a Catholic priest.” – A priest from Nigeria

6.1 Preliminary Assumptions

The phenomena of African priests in the US and reverse missions creates a quintessential outlook into the globalization of religion in today's modern society. Both of these phenomena are consequences of numerous social and ideological variables that have been unfolding throughout a series of continuing historical processes. Previous chapters in this research have examined the origins, adaptability, sustainability, and transformation of Christianity and the Catholic Church from different historical and geographical perspectives. Factors such as changing demographics, secularization, and political change have all been influential in the fluctuating intensity of a given region's religiousness. Therefore, as we have seen, such data may be indicating factors of both laity and clergy density in the Church. One thing that still remains unclear, however, is that of priests from the global south moving to and working in the global north. The initial assumption to such a phenomenon as this is economic prosperity. Are priests coming from regions such as Africa to the US and Europe for higher standards of living and wealth? This may in fact be the case for some priests. However, we have to realize that the Catholic priesthood in general is not a career choice made in the direction of personal financial gain. A career in politics or business would be a more viable career path for someone wishing to travel abroad for financial prosperity. Another assumption I initially came to when researching the reasoning behind this phenomenon of foreign priests abroad was a combination of two factors which formed the complementary relationship between human migration and ideological migration. Human migration refers to persons from the global south (e.g. Africa and South America) migrating to the global north (e.g. North America and Europe) and ideological migration refers to the ongoing transfer of Christianity's center from the global north to the global south. An example of this would be an African priest moving to an urban city with a large African community (such as New York) to supplement the demand for religious instruction in that community.⁷⁹ These priests migrate to such

⁷⁹ Religious historian Philip Jenkins cites an example of a foreign priest in the Protestant Church providing religious institution to fellow countrymen in a foreign

diaspora groups to provide religious instruction in the communities' vernacular and cultural customs and thus provide a means for church/community growth.

This phenomenon of global south to north migration of priests still contains additional variables than the two aforementioned palpable assumptions of economic gain and migration. In fact, in regions such as Western Europe and North America it is becoming increasingly more common to find foreign priests working among the local majority population. For instance, in 2004 an initiative to "re-evangelize the West" was raised at a Vatican-backed conference attended by priests and bishops from both Africa and Europe. Under this plan, African priests from regions where vocations were thriving were sent to areas in Europe in desperate need of clergy. In return, a smaller number of European priests were sent to areas in Africa as an exchange and primarily provided educational instruction for prospective seminarians. One crucial reason for this plan was to supplement priestly vacancies in Europe with the overabundance of priests in Africa. In 2004, the same year, British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* reported that there were a mere 18 priests ordained in both England and Wales. In the diocese of Dublin there was only one priest ordained the same year. Conversely, in Nigeria alone there were about 5,000 men training to be priests.⁸⁰ Today, for example, it is not uncommon to find a Ghanaian priest celebrating mass in German in an Austrian village or a Nigerian priest teaching in English at a Catholic school in the US. Moreover, these cases of foreign priests working abroad are not exclusive only to large cosmopolitan communities in cities such as London or New York. Rather, foreign priests are also commonly found in rural areas which are often the most removed from the modern path of globalization. This modern path of globalization could be referred to as global or world cities, those of which have direct and tangible effects on global affairs through strong socio-economic means.⁸¹ London, New York, Hong Kong, and Tokyo are among some of such cities due to factors such as large population, high level of economic exchange, and cultural interaction. Foreign priests are indeed found in such global cities. However, the need and presence of these priests is not exclusive to such locations often regarded as the leaders in economic and cultural

environment: "One spectacular manifestation of the New Churches would be London's Kingsway International Christian Church (KICC), founded by Nigerian pastor Matthew Ashimolowo. He began in 1992 with only 300 members, and now the KICC seats 5,000 worshippers at its main facility, the Miracle Center, as well as several satellite churches. The KICC is claimed as the largest church to be created in Britain since 1861." Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, p. 53, 2007.

⁸⁰ Petre, *Telegraph*, p. 1, 2004.

⁸¹ Sassen, *India*, 2001.

activity. Instead, we see that cities of the global south such as Nairobi, Kenya and Enugu, Nigeria have become the epicenters of religious education. Upon graduation, many of these individuals are sent abroad to areas not afforded such large priestly vocation numbers; many of these areas being small and rural such as in the case study interviews for this research.

6.2 From Global to Local Level

In order to garner a more thorough understanding of a global phenomenon such as this, the research regarding foreign priests abroad will be taken to the local level. Therefore, one of the best methods to achieve this goal is the application of the interview, which is administered to African priests in the Catholic Church living and working in the global north. The purpose of such interviews is to recognize the foreign priest phenomenon at a local level, which will in turn hopefully provide a better understanding of the global process. The results collected from these interviews, combined with the information extrapolated from the previous chapters, will provide perspectives from historical, geographical, and biographical angles. As this paper has been concerned primarily with the relationship between Catholicism in Africa and the US, the subjects selected for the interviews were African born priests currently working in the US.

6.3 Sample and Objectives

Subjects were selected from two neighboring dioceses in the south-eastern state of Tennessee. Neighboring states and their dioceses such as North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, and Georgia were additional possibilities for additional interviews as they are also home to African priests. However, limited funding and time constraints required the research to focus on just two dioceses. The interviews made and information collected from the priests in these two dioceses was more fruitful than anticipated.⁸² The two dioceses selected for the interviews were the Diocese of Knoxville and the Diocese of Nashville, both located in Tennessee. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville, formed in 1988, spans 36 counties and contains 47 parishes and 10

⁸² Responses given by subjects started to become consistent for many questions and varied for others. This was realized after the third interview and was therefore deemed that the sample size would suffice for this research. Future research focusing on the entire South-eastern US and its dioceses (thus containing a larger sample size), however, would prove beneficial in better understanding this phenomenon.

schools.⁸³ The estimated population of the diocese is approximately 60,000 Catholics. Although formed in the late 80's, this area in Tennessee was not new to Catholicism; the two oldest churches in the diocese were founded in 1852. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville, on the other hand, dates back to 1837 and has a population of approximately 70,600 Catholics, which constitutes 3.4% of the overall population of Middle Tennessee.⁸⁴ These statistics for this diocese are spread throughout 53 parishes and 3 missions divided into 3 deaneries.⁸⁵

There were a total of six priests interviewed from both of the aforementioned diocese, all of whom were born in various parts of Africa.⁸⁶ The average duration for each interview was approximately one hour, with 1.5 hours being the maximum and 40 minutes being the minimum. Interviews were conducted in person in either the respective priest's office or rectory; the priest and I being the sole persons present in the room. Each interview consisted of a standard pre-written set of 30 questions, none of which were disclosed with the priests beforehand, which contained questions ranging from name and age to the priests personal opinions about the Catholic Church's stance on certain social issues. The first half of the interview was designed to gather background information from each priest and learn about their lives, while the second half was designed to elicit responses focusing on the modern Catholic Church in Africa, the US, as well as their similarities and differences. It was made clear to each priest before the interview that they were not obligated to answer every question and could willingly pass if they felt uncomfortable in any way. This interview process and its set of 30 questions were structured in a way so as to meet the following primary objectives⁸⁷:

- 1) Discover the motivation(s) for Africans to join the priesthood.
- 2) Determine the intentions for African priests coming to live and work in the US.
- 3) Establish differences and similarities between the Catholic Church in Africa and in the US.

⁸³ Knoxville, *Diocese*, 2010.

⁸⁴ "Prior to 1970, the diocese encompassed the entire state. At that time, Pope Paul VI removed the westernmost counties in the state to create the new Diocese of Memphis; 18 years later, Pope John Paul II removed the easternmost counties to create the Diocese of Knoxville." Nashville, *About Us*, 2010.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Five of the priests interviewed were working in the Diocese of Knoxville and one priest was working in the Diocese of Nashville. Three of the priests were Nigerian and the other three were Kenyan, Ghanaian, and Sudanese.

⁸⁷ The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

- 4) Ascertain whether these individuals can be considered as missionaries and if this is a process of reverse-missions.

Therefore, each of the questions asked in the interviews were designed to either directly or indirectly answer these objectives. At times during the interviews it was necessary to ask follow-up questions to responses given. However, the average number of questions asked was 30.

6.3.1 Age of Priests

The mean age of the priests interviewed was 49.5 years old, with the oldest being 63, the youngest being 42, and a median age of 47.5 years. Not one of the priests would be considered a novice as the average years having been already ordained for all interviewees was 18.16; the longest was 23 years and the shortest was 12 years, with a median of 19 years. As these individuals already had a significant amount of experience under their belts, the question of where the majority of their work-experience was spent naturally arose. The average amount of time the priests had been working in the US was 9.8 years, with a high of 13 years, a low of 7 years, and the median being 9.5 years. The amount of time each priest had been at his current respective parish where the interviews took place was considerably less; the average being 3.75 years, the longest 7 years, the shortest 1.5 years, and the median being 2.5 years. When asked about their ecclesiastical careers prior to moving to the US, they had all moved around to various parishes in different regions, countries, and continents. One priest from Ghana was sent to Venezuela upon his ordination and spent 7 years in that country. Another priest from Nigeria went from working in a rural Nigerian village, to a larger city in Germany for 2 years, and then to work and study in Rome for 4 years. Every priest had experienced a considerable amount of travel and re-location upon his ordination. This Nigerian priest describes in detail the various assignments and jobs given him after his ordination:

After my seminary studies and ordination I worked as the assistant secretary to the secretary to our bishop, then was also the assistant manager to one of the primary schools, then was also the assistant financial administrator, was also in charge of the secretariat, then was also then chaplain to the secondary school, then was also a member of the Bible society of Nigeria. So this was what I did shortly after my ordination. Then I was transferred to the Junior Seminary where I actually studied. So I taught systematic handwriting, I also taught ethics, then was also the bookkeeper in the seminary. I was there in the seminary for three years before the Bishop asked me to come over to the US for studies.

6.3.2 Family Backgrounds

One of the first steps in understanding an individual and the choices he has made in his life is to understand his upbringing. The way a person is raised and the type of environment he is exposed to as a child are factors that can greatly influence future life decisions. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to assess each priest's family background. All of the priests interviewed came from what would most likely be considered average sized African families, having from 3 to 10 siblings in a two parent household. Also, all of the priests except for one came from mid to upper middle-class families, with the one exception being a priest from the Sudan:

My parents were farmers; they were poor people so they relied heavily on the garden work. They cultivated food and that's how they fed us and educated us. We were 5 children also with my parents. Three boys and two girls. The rest are married and I'm the only priest in the family. I'm the last born, the youngest.

A priest from Nigeria responded about his family background:

I come from a pretty large family. My father was the only son, the only male child of his parents. And then my mother came from a polygamous family. The father of my mother had about two or three wives. And my mother was one of the most beloved in the family that she came from, so the father allowed her to go to school to be educated. She went to school as a child and then ended up as a teacher. And then my father was also very educated. My father also worked a lot for the priests, for the Irish priests. They were Irish missionaries. He did things like being a teacher in the schools (which were manned by the Irish priests that were missionaries) and then went to a teachers training college, also manned by Irish priests. And then eventually he went to the University, graduated in Economics. Then came to the United States and did his Master's degree in Education. Went to Canada, did his Post-Masters, he was going for a Doctorate and by that time he already had a family. So it was not easy for him, so somewhere along the way he came back. Then I have many siblings, I have three brothers and five sisters.

Another priest from Kenya had this to say about his family:

My dad married my mom and they were both Catholics. Then we were 7 siblings, 3 brothers and 4 sisters. My dad has since died. And then my elder brother also died and two sisters. The last born was a girl and died because of a tumor. The rest of us are still alive. My mother is in Kenya and all of my brothers and sisters.

Despite the previously mentioned priest admitting to coming from a poor family of farmers, it was apparent that all of the priests' families were able to support their children. They all admitted to coming from stable families with two parents who cared and provided for them. Additionally, the majority of priests had at least one parent who was educated, many having higher education at the university level.

Another essential component to family background is whether an individual has had a religious upbringing. Whether a priest was raised in a religious household or not, exposure to religion at an early age, as well as the scope of their religious upbringing are all factors that may have had an impact on their decision to join the priesthood. When I refer to the “scope of religious upbringing”, I’m referring not only to the role that religion played in the priest’s early life, but also the frequency. Saying that one was raised in a Christian or religious household can be quite an ambiguous statement, in that he or she may have attended religious services once a year, once a day, or not at all. It also does not clearly describe the role that religion played in the person’s family life. Has religion played a central role to the family unit? Or was it really not a significant part of the family’s daily life? Therefore, priests were asked to go into as much detail as possible about their religious upbringing. The interviews revealed that all the priests interviewed were brought up in Catholic families, where religion played a fundamental role. When asked if he was raised in a religious family, one priest from Nigeria describes the role of the Catholic Church during his childhood and the relationship with his father:

...actually I was born into a Catholic family. Both of my parents, who are still alive today, are Catholics. They were married and wedded in the church. So I grew up in that family. And, a family of five; three boys and then two girls. Then I started primary 1 by going with my father from one school to another, one school to another. Cause my father was a teacher in the Catholic school, but he was also the station teacher. What the Irish missionaries did, the way of evangelization, everywhere that you find a teacher teaching in the school he would also be the station teacher. In other words, maybe five o’clock in the morning you would open the church for people to come for morning prayer and then it’s eight o’clock and he goes to school and then teaches. So I moved with him from one school to another all through the six years of primary 1-6. The only year I was not with him was the last year which was, umm... no it was one year, it was my primary five while he was the head master in the primary school, like high school here in the United States. And that was the only year I stayed with my mother, and then I was doing primary 5.

Another Nigerian priest describes his religious upbringing and how it influenced his decision to join the priesthood at an early age:

Every day my family made it obligatory for us to attend morning Mass despite the distance from our family to the church. We had to go every day. The family background was of great importance to my vocation. Because we are so religious. We couldn’t have our breakfast if we didn’t go to morning Mass. So that gives you an idea where we come from. That was one of the factors that helped me in being who I am today.

So I had a very strong Christian upbringing. I joined the seminary at the age of 12 years. Throughout my lifetime, junior seminary. Then went to philosophy campus and did my 4 years in philosophy. Did my orientation by teaching at a seminary. Then went to Bigard Memorial Seminary, the biggest seminary,

before my ordination. Because of the boom of vocation in Nigeria now there are so many other seminaries other than Bigard. The call for vocation in my country is great, especially in my diocese.

A priest from Nigeria on his religious upbringing:

...ever since I became conscious of my family, I realized that I came from a very religious family. Whereby every day we had to pray in the morning before we went to school, every night we had to pray the rosary before we went to bed. And then in most cases we went to mass in the morning, and then we come back home and get ready to go to school. So that was the type of family I came from. Everything about religion in my family is non-negotiable. You just had to do it no matter how it was. If we got into the car to go on a journey into the country, we had to do the rosary while we were in the car. So I think that the religious atmosphere of my family was actually the beginning of my vocation to the priesthood.

Every one of the priests interviewed admitted being raised in strongly religious Catholic family. The majority of priests attended mass with their families on a daily basis, in addition to other daily religious activities. The other priests attended mass on average 3-5 times per week and normally before each school day. Another similarity found between family backgrounds was that Catholicism had been in each priest's family for at least one subsequent generation.⁸⁸ In addition, several priests had parents who either worked for or played an active role in the Church. There are two distinct conclusions that can be drawn from this section regarding priests' family backgrounds. The first is that the majority of priests come from families of a relatively stable financial status. Each priest interviewed said his family was able to provide the fundamental necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. In fact, the majority of priests interviewed, except for one, come from middle-class families or above. Although exact figures of family income were not provided, the overall lifestyles and professions of each family implied such economic/class status.⁸⁹ The second conclusion to be drawn from family backgrounds, and perhaps the most apparent, is that all priests come from very religious Catholic families. This conclusion comes from statements made by the priests of being raised in strong religious environments, stories of their childhood involving the Church or religious elements, and to a lesser extent, many of the priests had Christian given-names.

⁸⁸ All priests interviewed said their parents were either raised Catholic or converted to Catholicism at an early age.

⁸⁹ Factors such as one or more parents having received higher-educations, type of profession of parent, owning a car, or the priest admitting to coming from a "well-off" family were used to label families as "middle-class" or higher.

6.3.3 Education

Like that of religion, education has played a central role in the lives of the priests interviewed. All of the priests received a standard primary education until age twelve, and upon completion all except for one joined a junior seminary which lasted for six years. The junior seminary was described as being similar to high school in the US, where students are educated in various subjects such as mathematics, history, language, and the sciences. The key difference being that the junior seminary prepares pupils for the senior seminary by providing instruction in topics such as theology, dogmatism, and scripture. Those priests who attended junior seminary also went to a private Catholic school, several of them describing the Catholic schooling in their counties as a means to a better education than public school. The language of instruction for those who attended the junior seminary was English, except for one individual who studied in the local vernacular of Annang.

Because it is an obligatory prerequisite to becoming a priest in the Catholic Church, all interviewees attended a senior seminary. The senior seminary was closely compared to being the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree, with the majority of priests concentrating their studies in the fields of either philosophy or theology. Admission to such seminaries required a series of testing that lasted anywhere from 2 weeks to a month; admission was described as being quite competitive as not all individuals are accepted into seminary. The language of instruction for all priests at the senior seminary level was English. A Nigerian priest describes the competitive nature of the seminary:

“...because we have this boom of vocation in Nigeria now, there is not so much room for outsiders. The seminary is very competitive. It's either you are a good seminarian to come up with good priests or you are not. You have to do your best, there is no half-priest. It's either you are there intellectually and physically, all of that which is needed to have a balanced priest to come up with being a good priest.”

Another Nigerian priest describes the extent of his intertwined academic career and clerical work:

“I was educated in Nigeria. You know we have the British system of education. I went to kindergarten, which was interrupted by the Civil War in 1967-1970. At that time my father was in politics, he was a congressman and many of them were being sought to be executed so we had to escape to the country. So we lived in the country for three years. And then when the war was over we had to go back to the city again. And then I continued my Primary School, finished my Primary School and then I went into the Seminary at the age of 12. And then I finished my Junior Seminary and then I taught in the seminary for one year. I taught the junior ones, then I was teaching Biology, Economics, Geography, manning the office for the Rector, being the Rector's chauffeur, I had to do everything. And then after that I was sent to the senior Seminary

where I studied for four years, studying Philosophy. After four years I graduated with a degree in Philosophy and I was sent for Theology, which I also spent four years. Then I graduated in Theology after four years, then I was ordained a priest. Then I worked in Nigeria for about 5-6 years being in the parish as an assistant for two years, then they invited me to work at the Seminary from where I graduated to work as a Financial Administrator. And then I was supposed to be there for three years, but I was there for two years and then I was sent to an Institute for Ecumenical Education where I was supposed to teach for one year Philosophy of Religion. But within 6 months of that one year the bishop invited me, telling me that there was an opening for a scholarship abroad in Rome and wondered if I would apply. So then I applied and got the scholarship, so I left Nigeria for Italy. In Rome I did my Masters and PhD in Philosophy.”

A Kenyan priest who went to a mission school to train and become a religious missionary describes the processes of joining both the junior and senior seminaries:

“When I finished 8th grade I went to minor seminary in Nairobi. That was 1986 and lasted for 4 years. Now when you go to minor seminary that is also like High School. You do all the government education system and subjects and you are tested like any other public schools. The only difference is that in the minor seminary you have also a spiritual formation apart from academic studies. You do extracurricular activities as part of the program.”

“After the 4 years then, because I wanted to be a missionary, you get results fast from the government after doing the national exams. Your results will qualify you to join a university. So even if you continue with your vocation you must have a grade that is equivalent with anyone joining a university or college. So after my minor seminary, then I had to apply to continue with my religious formation. So I joined the Apostles of Jesus to study Philosophy in Kenya.”

Regarding higher education, 2/3 of the priests interviewed had a Master’s Degree or higher; 75% of whom held PhDs or were current PhD candidates. Where did these priests receive these degrees? 50% of the higher-education degrees earned by priests were from schools outside their native country. 75% of these degrees were earned in the US and 25% in Italy. Also, one priest who did not complete a Master’s degree or higher, received his senior seminary education in England. The language of instruction for all of the priests during their senior seminaries and higher-educations was English.

6.3.4 Vocation in the US

Each of the priests interviewed had quite an extensive ecclesiastical career prior to moving to the US. They maintained various types of priestly vocations in different kinds of settings. This Nigerian priest shares his duties post-ordination before moving to the US:

“After my seminary studies and ordination I worked as the assistant secretary to the secretary to our bishop, then was also the assistant manager to one of the primary schools, then was also the assistant financial administrator, was also in charge of the secretariat, then was also then chaplain to the secondary school, then was also a member of the Bible society of Nigeria. So this was what I did shortly after my ordination. Then I was transferred to the Junior Seminary where I actually studied. So I taught systematic handwriting, I also taught ethics, then was also the bookkeeper in the seminary. I was there in the seminary for three years before the Bishop asked me to come over to the US for studies.”

A Sudanese priest on his work experience following ordination:

“When I was ordained I was sent to northern Uganda as I told you earlier. And then after that I was an associate in that parish. And I hardly stayed for 2 months and the Bishop made me a chaplain there for a college in Uganda. So I was working in the parish and in the college as a chaplain. So that went on for about 2 more years and then I became the pastor there in that church. And then I worked as a pastor for almost 4 years. And while I was working as a pastor I was also working as assistant to the vocation director in the diocese. And also in the Pastoral Formation program in the diocese. I also helped in organizing the first Synod of the diocese. So those are some of the things that I did there, but it was a good experience.”

The other priests had similar stories of their ecclesiastical careers prior to the US. All of the priests except for one worked in Africa after their priestly ordination.⁹⁰ So why in fact did they come to work in the US? When asked how and why he came to the US, this Nigerian priest had the following to say:

“I did not choose, the Bishop chose. Normally every diocese, if someone, if a priest is to go out for studies the bishop is always the one to ask you to go, and then gives you permission. So when you come over to the US, if you are attached to a parish or to a diocese your bishop back home will have to give a letter stating that you are in good standing with the church of the diocese to the bishop of the diocese that you are going. So while you are studying there, the bishop of the diocese where you are going can give you also at least a place of residence, then you can also help in the parish when you are going to school.”

A second Nigerian priest had a different explanation and conditions as to why he came to the US:

“Well in the year 2000 my bishop had a request from Chad Republic for a priest from Nigeria to come and help in the diocese there. I volunteered to go there. While this was about to take place, the bishop declared our diocese a missionary diocese, because we had a lot of priests, more than we need. So that entails you could be asked anytime to go and help diocese that are in need of priests. One of the remarkable comments he made was that this country was not like Europe, it's not like America, it's a country totally different. So he wouldn't just appoint anyone to go, and if I want to volunteer I should do it.

⁹⁰ The only exception being a priest from Ghana who was sent to Venezuela upon his ordination and lived there for 7 years before moving to the US.

So two of us went there and I learned a lot. What we learned there you never get in any book, it's an experience that enriched our lives. It's a country run by Muslims, and there are very poor people. I never imagined in my life what it meant to be in such a poor country. So that was how my missionary life started. And from time to time I would come to Nigeria in order to get help and assist the church there. So I worked there for 3 years in a parish there. So after the 3 years, my bishop was so impressed that I opened that door for others because they were afraid to go. So he said "feel free anywhere you want to go to continue with your mission and your studies." So he suggested I go to France, because I now speak French. But because I was more used to coming to America, I felt more comfortable coming here. So he said, "Ok anywhere you want to, I will endorse your going." So I went to the US. The first place I came for work was in Louisiana. I stayed there for a couple of months, then applied to Phoenix diocese. While I was waiting for them to prepare my materials I went to Oakland to visit my cousin. One of the nuns saw me there and heard my English and said "where are you from, you speak good English". And I said, "well thank you." And I told her my mission and she said they needed priests there in Oakland. She was the Chancellor of the Diocese, and she went and told the bishop there and they asked me to come over the next day. Before you knew it they had me make an agreement and everything and contacted my Bishop. So I stayed there a while then I went to Phoenix. One month staying there I couldn't stand the heat. It was so hot for me. Then I said goodbye because I had the option to go to Oakland, immediately they gave me a parish there. So I served in three or four parishes during the time I was there for almost four years. And I was made the chaplain of the Nigerian Catholic Community. That was one of the challenges I had, to develop a Nigerian church in Oakland. Because we have so many Nigerian Catholics. And before I left we had over 3,500 coming from all over the dioceses. When I accomplished my four years there my bishop visited me there and for some reason he felt that I should look for more places there for priests to come over, because we have a lot of priests. So that was why I came down to this Diocese. So I came from Oakland to Nashville. And since I came here one of the things that the Bishop did here very fast to get my papers, apply for my green card. That was a very serious incentive. That was the first thing he did. Which the other dioceses were delaying to do. Now I'm a permanent resident waiting to become a citizen."

The third Nigerian priest interviewed said that the death of his mother influenced him to move to the US for studies:

"And after 2 years I told the bishop that I was going through a little bit of crisis of faith, with my philosophy, with the understanding of the death of my mother, with my world turning around. I thought I needed to do some courses that would reinforce my faith. I needed to do a little bit more of theology to balance my philosophy. So I had saved some money while I was in Germany and I applied for a Masters in Systematic Theology, because I had a friend here in the United States, and then I got admission at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. So I got the admission and I came to the US. That is how I came here."

A Sudanese priest on how and why he came to the US:

"That's a good question. You know I am a missionary. Maybe I didn't tell you, but I'm a religious missionary priest. And as a religious missionary priest I've

taken the three vows. There are the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. So coming to the US falls under the vow of obedience. I got two mails, one from the former bishop here of Louisville and then one from a Superior in Uganda. Then I got these two mails telling me I've been transferred from that parish where I was working to Knoxville. And then the letter from the bishop here reads that you are assigned to Knoxville, and all this. So I said ok, what is going on here and I called our general in Nairobi. He told me that I had already been transferred so I needed to prepare myself and get ready and move. Because I was expected to be in Knoxville in December of 2003. So I told the people that I was moving, and then in January of 2004 was when I came because the visa process took a bit longer and I couldn't make it by December. I did not choose but just because I have to obey my superiors since I've already made my vow to God that I have to obey whatever my superior tells me. So that's how it worked."

A Ghanaian priest had this to say about being sent to the US:

"They ask you if you want to go. You can say yes or no, it is up to me to decide. You are not forced to do things. Free will."

When asked how it came to be to move to the US and if it was his decision, a Kenyan priest said:

"No. I had no idea. I never dreamt in my life that I would go abroad. Actually the USA was the least of all in my mind. Well if you are a missionary you take the vow of obedience. You are trained that you can be transferred anywhere in the world. That's what a missionary is. Missionaries your formation is very wide compared to a diocesan priest because you can be sent anywhere in the world. Your superiors can assign or transfer you anywhere they want. They can consult you, they can ask you, or they can just tell you that you are assigned to any place. You have already taken the vow of obedience and if you want you can seek dialogue with them. So I just got this letter that said I was being transferred to work in the United States. I didn't know even how to pronounce Knoxville though."

Thus these priests followed various paths after their seminary ordinations. Several of the priests stayed in their home countries for some time before being transferred to the US, while others moved to other countries for either work or study. Vocations held by the priests also varied quite considerably, depending on the needs of the priests' bishops or dioceses. Parish pastors, financial bookkeepers, secretaries, assistants to the bishops, and lecturers at the senior or junior seminaries were some of the more common positions held by the priests both during and after seminary ordination. When examining the "how" and "why" factors of the priests being transferred to the US, there are more parallels that can be drawn. For example, 2/3 of the priests were transferred to the US at the request of their bishops. An agreement was made between each priest's home diocesan bishop and the respective receiving diocesan bishop in the US. These priests stated they had no influence on the bishops' decisions to transfer them to the US and no

knowledge of why they were selected. Once told they would be transferred to the US, the priests had a choice to accept or decline the assignment. However, each priest maintained that their vow of obedience compelled them to follow the instruction of their superiors. The remaining 1/3 of the priests either had an influence in the decision or chose themselves to be transferred to the US; all cases having proper consent from the respective bishops. Lastly, 1/3 of the priests said that they came or were sent to the US for studies at the university level, either Master's or Doctoral programs. The other 2/3 was sent to the US for diocesan work due to the shortage of priests in the respective region. All of the priests interviewed said that immigration and visa issues did not create problems for their transfer.

6.3.5 Vocation in the US compared to Africa

Although the Catholic Church states that it is universal, cultural and social differences make the working life of a priest different depending on the country and region. Priests were asked about their working lives in the US and in Africa. A priest from Nigeria on an average day's work in his parish:

"Basically, in terms of the hours it wouldn't be less than eight hours because you begin by celebrating morning mass. In fact this is the only parish in the diocese that has two masses every morning. Here we have 7 o'clock and then we also have 8:30. There are also some days that will have a 12 noon mass at the VA because the VA is also under the services of the priests here. Then there are also some weeks that will have mass at the nursing home. So you begin mass at 7 in the morning, then 8:30, and then you go out with the parish nurses to visit those who are home bound, and you can also visit those who are in the hospitals. Then you can also respond to calls or you visit those who are in the nursing homes."

The same priest on an average day's work back home in Africa:

"Being a priest is much more demanding and intense in terms of the number of people that might line up to see you back home. So sometimes in a particular day you might have 20 to 30 people lining up to see you. They make so many requests, they ask you to pray for them, they can even ask for you to come to their families and pray for them there. Those who are coming to ask for financial help or to come and ask for food, especially the raw food, especially if it is the Sunday service, because back home when the people are bringing there offering they bring the raw food to you like bags of yam, cassava, or live chicken, or furniture. They bring these and give them to you every first Sunday of the month. So there are some families that are not so well to do, so that after the Sunday services they come to the rectory or go to see the priest, and the priest, especially most of the perishable food you have to give them to some of these families to help them. So I would say the average work load back home in Africa is much more intensive than here. But it might also depend on the

parish. For me comparatively, the parish I am here St Mary's is with over 1,200 families is also very demanding. It's very demanding. We also have an outreach station at Unicoi that we go there to serve the Hispanic community. The Hispanic community is also a big community here. Then in addition St. Mary's also has a school, so that is also additional work. There are some parishes in the diocese that do not have schools."

A priest from Nigeria working in one of the larger parishes on an average day's work for him in the US:

"When I was in St. Stephens Parish for four months it was a big parish, they were very wonderful people. I was assistant parish priest there. After four months the Bishop needed me more in Immaculate Conception, which has over 10,000 military families there. There is a lot to be done there. Because I had my area in hospital ministry, I was predominantly occupied with hospitals, nursing homes, and the sick. So the bishop said that he has a need for someone to take over the ministry for the diocese. So now I'm managing four hospitals here. And all the hospices. So I'm always available here. I don't sit around and do nothing. It's really very tasking."

The same priest compares a day's work in the US to one back home in Africa:

"Compared to Africa, you can't compare it to what we have in Africa. To be a priest in Africa is very tasking too. Very tasking more than it is here. Because the priests think that you are the only one in your parish. You take the decision to do everything. We don't have married deacons as we have here. So during time for Christmas or holidays, you have to have the compassion that everyone wants to go to confession, and there are about 5,000 people. You take about 2 weeks to begin confession every day, every afternoon, sometimes even in every day. In communion if you don't have a senior seminarian, you are done for. No one will help you. People will not go to anybody. We don't have any assistants anywhere. Like here the priests have someone to assist them, there we don't have that. If you are lucky you may have a senior seminarian to help you. You say the masses to everybody. So it was very tasking. We had the respect of the people. They respected us a lot. They (parishioners) are there to provide for us irrespective of their poverty. They value their priests so well and cherish us."

A priest from the Sudan on an average day of work in the US and in Africa:

"Well, I must say that here in the US it is structured more than in Africa. I must say here I've got more hours of work than when I was in Africa. Here I leave at 7 in the morning to be in the school and then I stay until 3:30. Sometimes we have meetings after 3:30, the normal hour when school gets out. But then sometimes it can go more than that and sometimes you leave around 4. Then sometimes you have other priestly commitments like sick calls to go to. Whereas in Africa you are the one planning your own work schedule, so you are working according to your own plan, at your own pace and all that. But it's not very structured like it is here."

This Nigerian priest goes into detail about the differences between working in the US and in Africa as well as the difficulties he has encountered working in a new cultural environment:

“You know in Africa I want people to know that a priest is a very important person. As important as a governor of a state, whatever he says is law. That kind of a thing. You are very prominent there. But over here in America a priest is an insignificant person, especially with the abuse cases, after the abuse cases where the priests abused children. You know the dignity of the priest got diminished sort of. But in Nigeria a priest is everything. When I mean that priest is everything, what it means is that you influence the lives of the people whichever way you want them to be influenced. If you are in a town or a village, you are a reference point. Everybody knows you. You cannot come to any place without being recognized. Nothing happens without you being part of it. But when you come to America it's a different thing. And that's why many times we find out that priests would like to come here on vacation but they wouldn't like to live here. Priests from my area, they would like to come on vacation, but tell them to come and live here and they wouldn't like to live here. Because it is a discipline here that is very difficult. And then again over there in my country the people are very good to the priest. I remember when I was a priest, there were very rich people who would tell me, "whenever you need another car, let me know." "Whenever you want your tires to be changed, just come here and pick up 4 tires." Things like that, you know. And because of their generosity, they love God and they love the priest. If you visit somebody, it's like God coming to somebody. They are very appreciative of that. For me, I think part of it is because over here (US) we are much industrialized, over there people are still very simple and very trusting. So that's the big difference. But then you know with time, you start to realize that we have very good and wonderful people here in the United States in the different parishes. Those who are ready to sacrifice, those who are ready to do anything for the priest. But at the same time you have to tread cautiously because you just met them, you never knew them before, not as if you would treat someone at home. You have to be very cautious and very careful. And then with the red flags of the abuse cases you really have to be careful how you handle young people and elderly people, vulnerable people. But at home that type of cautiousness is not there. You are just yourself, people understand one another. But here it's a type of re-orientation, you have to begin to learn a new culture to make sure that you are very careful about whatever you do to cross your t's and dot your i's so that you're sure. And then the work of the priest both in Africa and here are almost the same thing but then you have to put them in their rightful perspective. Another thing that connects them again is that you don't have any time of your own in Africa and in the US. For instance, if I'm here and get a sick call I have to go to it, and I have to write my homilies. And it takes me a while to write the homilies and go slow, because the English concepts are not well refined in my head because of other languages so I have to do this for about 3 months to get used to what I'm doing and the way the people are speaking. So it was difficult for me, it wasn't easy. And then, the other thing that is a little bit off is that the first time that you meet someone they say, “Oh you have an accent”. So it makes them see you as different and you feel different like an outsider. So when somebody says that as the first thing, you feel first of all unaccepted, you feel sort of beaten, defeated. Because what I tell myself is that everybody has an accent, it depends who is in the majority and who is in the minority. So that was part of what I started to feel whenever I spoke, that I had an accent. And then with time the accent became something

also good because some young people would say that, “you have an accent and your accent is so nice, I like how you speak, say that word again”. So from being something that makes me feel bad, I began to feel happy about it. And then I came down to the South and then I began to hear the Southern drawl, you know they would say a word forever, not only the drawl but also in their behavior, cause you would tell somebody to do this thing today and you come one week or a month later and it’s still not done, they want to take their time and do it, but I want it now. I have to disagree with a lot of people with regards to procrastinating and telling me they will do things and then never do it. I remember one of the first people like this here, I had to tell him that it's either you do what I want or I can't work with you and you have to quit. And I was happy for it because I want things to be done. You know the language barrier is there. The only way we try to overcome it is that when you are in a parish for a while people begin to understand you and begin to tune their ears. But they will tell you, that now you are speaking better now and that you have learned our accent. But it's not learning the accent; they are also adjusting to understand me while I'm adjusting to speak to be understood. And then we try to speak slowly so that we can be understood.”

A Ghanaian priest provides a concise statement on an average work day in the US:

“Well we have mass in the morning at 8:30 and then in the afternoon sometimes. People come to see you. Obviously that's all.”

And a priest from Kenya recounts the working life for a priest in the US and in Kenya:

“Well you start with mass at 9 and then you are in the office till 5. There are some days which you are very busy and other days it depends. I have one day off. But that does not mean that it is always free. If there is a need for an emergency call or something I have to respond. But otherwise it is good. It is relaxing and at some times very hectic.”

“Well in Kenya you have too much than here. In Kenya the priests work so much that they really don't live long. They work with too much demanding work in Africa and other third world countries. There is a lot of work in Africa because priests or religious people do everything. They manage the parish, they start projects and must look for money to start the projects. If you are assigned in a place where there is no church you have to decide how to build that church by yourself. So you have to look for money, apply to organizations abroad, applications, pastoral work, drive far away to churches on the weekends. So there is a lot in Africa compared to here.”

An assortment of responses was given when asked to describe and compare the working life of a priest in the US and in their home country. However, one similarity found between responses was that the workload in Africa for the average priest was greater. The general consensus was that in Africa the priest has more responsibilities, more parishioners to attend to, and less funding than the average US parish. In addition, the priest in Africa was said to be responsible for tasks normally given to parish secretaries or any other various paid positions

commonly held by laypersons in US parishes. The workload in the US was also said to be demanding, although at a different level. US parishes require more structure in the daily routines of the priests and follow a clear schedule, whereas most of the priests were used to working at their own pace and creating their own schedules. When asked about an average day of work in the US, all of the priests talked of keeping some sort of 8 hour work schedule; a standard for most jobs in that country. However, when describing an average day of work in Africa, the element of time was not a commonly cited factor. Instead, concentration was placed rather on the amount of work required, with no definite time frames or deadlines factoring in. Therefore, maintaining and keeping to a daily schedule was seen as a challenge for many priests in adapting to work in the US.

6.3.6 Other Difficulties

When asked whether they were content working in their respective US parish, all of the priests interviewed said they were. But what difficulties or hardships (if any) were these priests experiencing in a foreign environment? The American South has often been associated with acts of racial discrimination and prejudice, owing much to its historical views on slavery.⁹¹ With parish populations in the dioceses researched being predominantly white Anglo-Saxon, did priests ever experience any problems of discrimination or alienation? Since this is not a clearly measurable subject and dependent highly on opinion, priests were asked if they have ever encountered problems due to their nationality or skin color while in the US. While none of the priests said they experienced outright racism or prejudice, there were instances where some priests felt their skin color was the subject of indirect prejudice or alienation. A priest from Nigeria gives this example when asked about feelings of prejudice or racism due to his skin color:

⁹¹ Virginia was the first English colony to acquire slaves from Africa in 1619. By 1860 the slave population in the US reached 4 million, which was largely concentrated in the southern states Virginia (490,865), Tennessee (275,719), South Carolina (402,406), North Carolina (331,059), Mississippi (436,631), Louisiana (331,726), Kentucky (225,483), Georgia (462,198) and Alabama (435,080) (Library 2007). Towards the end of the American Civil War, in January of 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was passed, which emancipated slaves, and read: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Despite slavery being abolished, equal civil rights would continue to be an issue in the US for the following century, with racial tensions of varying degrees and continued prejudice in the former slave states. Constitution, US, 1865.

“Not so much so drastic, but in a subtle way. Yeah, I have to pay attention to all that. To the cultural issues. No one has ever come out so openly to say he or she does not want to talk to me because I am an African, no one has ever done that. But at least as a grown-up you can also pick out certain things, maybe certain nuances or body language or certain things that are done or some silence or some expression on the face. Or you drive on the road and then someone sees you, since there are not so many African-Americans, then they come to know you are serving in the parish. But I have never encountered any major withdrawal or rejection. I have not.”

Another priest from Nigeria talks about the stereotypes of racism and prejudice he had heard about the American South from another priest before moving there and his experiences in such a community after moving there:

“I haven't encountered it (racial prejudice) openly. It might be something subliminal or discreet, but only after the fact that you have realized it. But openly no. Even when I was in Copper Hill, one of the reasons the bishop did not want me to live there was because he heard that the previous priest who was there told him that they were racist, and because of my skin color it would not be good to stay there. But I think that my best life in America has been in Copper Hill. Those people are wonderful. I still have most of my friends there, they call me every time. It's a place you can visit somebody without calling them, you can just come. And they accept you. So sometimes people see you as different when you appear, but after you finish a mass or a homily people will say, “Wow, I've never heard such a homily”. So you win them by love. So that's the way it is. But openly nobody has ever.”

Feelings of prejudice among priests due to skin color or nationality were for the most part either non-existent or subtle only on a few occasions. The most common problem encountered by all priests in the US, however, was difficulties with language. Although all priests spoke high levels of fluent English and had been speaking it for most of their lives, it was not their mother tongue.⁹² It was an initial problem when moving to a new parish in the US for all of the priests to be understood due to their accents. In addition, several priests reported having difficulty understanding the accents of parishioners in the American South. A priest from Kenya talks about how his accent and skin color created problems for his adaptation when he first moved to the US:

“Myself and Father [*], we are the first African missionaries to work in this diocese. For us there was no program set up by the diocese for acclimation or to get used to the language or culture here. Maybe now they do have something but I don't know. I was very well received here but a very big change. After two weeks of first being here I wanted to go home. You feel lonely even though you feel loved. Because one thing you are black. You look like an outsider. You speak and people say they can't understand you and I can't understand them either. English is our second language so pronunciation is different for us. And

⁹² Native languages spoken by priests growing up were Annang, Igbo, Madi, Ga, Luo, Swahili, and English.

they want you to do it according to them, speak their accent like they speak in the south. It took a long time. You go to school or mass and some would not greet you. But the majority were good. They would ask you some funny questions like whether you take a shower at home in Africa or if you bought your shoes in Africa or in the US. The majority of people did not know where Africa is. The only thing they knew about Africa is poverty, diseases, and violence. That is just the concept of Africa. By and large though it was good.”

A priest from Sudan on accents and being understood by parishioners:

“...actually me understanding them was a bit easier than them understanding me. You know with all of my accent being from Africa, that has been a problem to so many people. Especially with the elderly people, they aren't always able to process what I say so easily. Because I go so fast. Sometimes when I give the homily they don't get me cause I go so fast, but when I slow down they are able to understand me better. But I didn't have any problem understanding them here. Actually we are lucky because we had lots of different seminary professors from different countries during our training in Nairobi. So we had people from India, Britain, America, Germany, all over. We were kind of used to adjusting to different accents, so when I came here it was so easy for me to understand people than they understanding me. So up to now I am still battling with that. And they are still having difficulties understanding me, but many people share with me that they can understand me much better now than when I first got here.”

A priest from Nigeria on his personal challenges with accents and being understood by parishioners:

“There are times that people tell me I should speak slowly, that they do not understand. I try to pay attention to that and also speak very slowly. Then there are also times that I do not understand them, especially in the South, the southern drawl, “How're yawl?” It took me some time to keep on thinking and what they are always asking is, oh, “How are you all?” But gradually with listening, when I listen I understand people very well.”

Despite the language barriers and occasional cultural differences that create problems, all of the priests interviewed said they were very content working in their respective parishes

6.3.7 The Catholic Church in Africa compared to the Catholic Church in the US

As mentioned in preceding chapters, the Catholic Church is a transnational organization. It is comprised of various components such as the clergy, lay people, the Holy See, and charitable organizations. These are just some of the elements that constitute what the Church is today, often having different meanings for different people. The translation of the Greek name for Catholic Church is “universal” or “general” church, meaning that the Church is one and the same. This is

to say that the Church's dogmatic teachings and practice may indeed be consistent. However, as the historical analysis of this research has shown, the Catholic Church has undergone dramatic change throughout the years of its existence. Demographic, cultural, ideological, and geographical factors have all played their part in shaping what the Catholic Church is today. Have these factors formed one modern universal church or created different versions of the same thing? Are there major differences in the Church in Africa and the Church in the US, and if so what are they? Also, does the Church play the same role in the life of a parishioner in the US as it does in the life of an Africa parishioner? As these priests had extensive experience in both regions, such questions were posed in order to find out the similarities and differences in both regions regarding religious life. A priest from Nigeria cited one of the major differences between the Church in the US and in Africa being attendance rates:

"The first one (difference) would be in terms of the number of attendants, the number of people coming to church. Like back home, the number of people coming to attend an average morning mass wouldn't be less than 50-60. And then morning mass is also very early at 6 am. Then some people go from mass to work. And then during the Sunday services, when you are conducting the Sunday services, they would be at least 2-3 hours. But here in the US you have to keep to one hour. And as I mentioned, during the offertory collection, parishioners come out and they dance and bring their offering to come give, but here it's not the same. And then back home, very rarely do we celebrate Sunday services on Saturday evening. Every Sunday service is on Sunday, whether we have 2 or 3 or 4 masses it's on Sunday including evening masses. But here in the US, under the parishes I've served they always have Sunday services on Saturday at 5pm."

When asked to describe the differences that the Church plays in the life of an African parishioner versus an American, the same priest responded:

"I would say the role that the church plays is the same. The only thing that would differ, what are the responses on the part of the parishioners or on the part of the people coming in to the local community. So that might also have to do with culture. When you pay attention to culture, culture is a way of life. I mean the culture here is also what is affecting the way people respond to the church services. So the culture back home is also what is affecting the way people are responding to church services. But the role of the church is the same."

A Nigerian priest working in one of the larger parishes in the dioceses had this to say about differences between the Church in the US and in Africa:

The Church is a universal church The catholic church is a universal church that is the same everywhere. But the pattern of worship is different. Remember I told you what the bishop said, when you go to any country or mission don't go

with the intention of changing them. The way things are done here (US) is good but totally different from that of Africa and Nigeria. The Nigerians are so relaxed about their faith. They're not in a hurry. Church is just number one for them and any other thing is second. On Sundays they don't work. No matter how much you are gonna pay them, they respect that (not working on Sundays). And when they go to Mass, the Mass will last for 2 or 3 hours and there will be constant clapping and dancing. You know, to lift up their spirits, that is what it is for you to work and motivate them, to build the faith. Unlike here in America, time is money. Before many of them (Americans) have gone to church they have already done the readings and know what it is about for the day. They (Americans) only want to fulfill their obligation and look at the time. They are very time conscious, especially with the mass. This doesn't mean they don't have their faith, they have their other commitments that they want. Some others do nothing more than come to Church for one hour and then go home and watch football. So you have to be very sensitive to different countries and their cultural differences. So that's what it is.

The same priest commented on the differences the Church plays in the life of an American versus African parishioner:

I'm not saying that Americans don't have the faith, they do, but the time factor and the commitments as well as the environment and the system here are different. I mean you listen to some of them they tell you the truth that they have to pay their bills and this and that, but in Nigeria they don't have all these bills to pay, and light or no light it doesn't bother them. But for here, to get that, you have to work and work and work.

This priest also from Nigeria reminds us that the Church in Nigeria is still very young, which comprises one of the major differences when comparing the US to Africa:

" Like I said, when we look at the church in Nigeria, we can understand that the church there is a young church, 170 years, not more than 200 years old. What it means is that many aspects of it are still trying to take root. And it's not yet as perfect as it should be or as strong as it should be. For instance I remember when I was a priest in Nigeria there was nothing like a salary paid to a priest or a stipend. And then when I look back today, I go to the internet and see what has been. Now I can see all the names of the priests from my diocese and all things. And then now you can hear from the priests how much they receive every month as their stipend. Before when I was there you had to depend on the generosity of the people. If you were in a rural parish, you were done for. Whatever you get there that is how you survive. If you were in a rich parish you were blessed. So today things are changing. Over here in America I also see some differences. For instance when I was up in the North, I could see how the priests are treated up the north, like some priests are paid according to their years of ordination, so the longer you have been a priest the more you receive. And when I came down South here everything is on the same level no matter who you are. So, it's good to see all of these dynamics. Because what it tells us is that the Church is continuously reforming itself. The church is dynamic, is changing, gets what is fresh and builds on it. And then when I look at the Church in Africa, I see a church that is very young and vibrant. When I look at the church in America, it's a church that would have been young if they did their homework. What do I mean? It would have been younger than it is if we took into consideration, evangelizing the African Americans right from the

start. Some of them are very surprised that you have black people as Catholics or as priests. I remember the first shock I got when I was living in Cleveland, Ohio, this nurse came to me and said "what Church do you belong to?" I said "I am a Catholic priest." She said, "Catholic? What are you doing there? Can black people be Catholics?" That was what she asked me. She couldn't believe it. So many people look at an elitist church that doesn't come down to their level. That was something that I feel, if we had evangelized them it would be different. So living down here in the Bible Belt is a whole different experience, than what operates in the North. So constantly here you are defending your faith, constantly here in the South they are asking you if the Catholic Church is a Christian Church. Because they don't believe we are Christians, they believe we are Crusaders but not Christians. While in Nigeria to be a Catholic it is something of privilege and honor, down here you still have to fight to defend your faith and let people know what the Catholic Church is. We (Catholic Church) are about 2-3% of the population here in Tennessee so you can understand how here we are in the minority, but over in Nigeria we are the majority."

The same priest says that the parishioners in the US and Africa are no different than common humanity, in that you can find both similarities and differences between the two. However, he does cite a clear difference when he goes on to describe average American parishioners as what he calls "Cafeteria Catholics":

"I call them" Cafeteria Catholics" because they pick and choose. They like one teaching of the church but not another, they like one commandment but not another. Just like how you go to a supermarket and you pick what you want, what you don't you trade it with something else. I think over here we have more vocal Cafeteria Catholics than we have at home. At home we might have them but they are not vocal. And then also, when I think about the parishes here and what we have at home, I also find that over here things work more smoothly because money has to do with a lot of things. At home, we struggle. For instance, we have a chapel of adoration. I remember before I came here that the Blessed Sacrament is always on the table, and if there is no one in that chapel you just use a veil and cover the Blessed Sacrament. So after a while I was at unease with that behavior, I wanted the blessed sacrament to be in a permanent place so that all you do if you come you open the door and the light will shine if you are going close, so that we don't go so near to cover it. So I called the people and said this thing can be done, we need about 4 or 5 thousand to build something. Within a week, I got that money. At home, people would be ready to do it but they don't have the means, or the money. So here not only are they willing but they also have the means to do it. But what I tell myself is that where the money is lacking at home, faith supplies the people in so many ways. One thing I've also discovered here is that people withhold money in order to punish the priests, because I think they give to priests which they like. I tell them that you give to God; you don't give to the priests. And then another big difference is, in Nigeria every member of a parish is registered. If somebody needs any services from the parish, they have to look at the list and see how much that person is contributing to the church. Over here we have some people who live downtown and come to mass, because they say they don't like that priest downtown so they have to come here, and they receive all of the benefits. You can't tell them you can't come here, but in Nigeria you can tell them that because they know they can't jump around to parishes without

permission from their parish priest. Even if you are going somewhere else, you have to get a letter from your parish priest saying that you have given money.”

A Ghanaian priest on the role of the Church for an American versus an African:

“Well I say people here (US) go to mass more out of obligation. Because they think if you don't go to mass you are committing a mortal sin. So they just go to mass and that's all. That's why the people are in a rush. Where there in Africa people have time for God, they give time for religious things.”

Other common differences shared by priests were that a typical African mass was energetic and charismatic while a US mass was focused less on energy and instead on reverence. Also, the length of mass and the priests' homilies were an issue in the US, in that parishioners expected them not to exceed a certain length of time. Thus variances in cultures were cited as the most common factors playing a role in the differences between the Church in different countries.

6.3.8 Vocational Boom and Blight: Motivation to join the priesthood in Africa

How do these differences between the Church in Africa and in the US affect the priestly vocation in both regions? The following questions were posed to garner an understanding of the vocational boom of priests in Africa versus the widespread vocational blight in the US, despite the continued increase in US Catholic membership. The previous chapter cited several reasons for the decline of priests in the US such as a decline in dogmatism, rise in secularization trends, and changing demographics. However, this does not completely answer the vocational boom in the global south. Are there conditions present in Africa for young men to be motivated to join the priesthood that are not so in the US? The first question posed to the priests interviewed was to describe the average life and role of a priest in Africa and in the US. A Nigerian priest describes how his responsibilities differed working in both countries:

“Yeah, it would not be the same. There is no way it can be the same. Comparatively, maybe for me, the responsibilities that I had back home are definitely not the same with the responsibilities that I have here. Over there the responsibilities would be much, while over here while the responsibilities would also be much its kind of identified with the services that I have here. But back home as I was teaching in the seminary and then also serving under as the secretary of the bishop my responsibilities extended to all the parishes. Back then we did not have cell phones getting to the parishes, but now we do. So if the bishop had a message for all the priests I would literally drive to all the parishes to leave those messages and then as well as some years later keep

driving and delivering any messages. But here it's not the same, cause I'm very restricted to the parish here. If there is anything that I need to do the hardest thing would be I need to make a phone call or send out an email. So I think the responsibilities change depending on the time and then on the development and technology."

Another priest from Nigeria cites responsibilities being a difference as well as the quality of life:

"Yeah, you have great responsibility in Africa. Some of us have come into the priesthood because of the urge to make a change, especially here in America. America is seen as the greatest country in the world. You've got so many things that you don't have in Africa, like being taken care of. The system is so planned. For example your health. The diocese insures you have your healthcare connected to a healthcare provider. If you are sick, you go get treatment. But in Africa it's not that way. You work and work and work and sometimes the money is not there for you. People are poor, not that they don't have the goodwill to give. Sometimes priests die simply because of negligence."

A priest from the Sudan admits that from his experiences a priest in America shoulders more sole responsibility, although he is paid a salary:

"The responsibility of a priest in Africa depends on whatever you've been given to do. Like if you are the parish priest then you shoulder the big responsibility, both here and also in Africa. But then when I was in Africa, let me give my own example. We used to share the responsibility with the other three priests I was working with cause I was the parish priest and also being given a lot of work in the diocese. So I could share my duties with the rest of the priests. Over here if you are the parish priest, you shoulder the big responsibility. But if you plan well also with the associate you can always share. And then of course for the payment, in Africa we are not paid. It's only when I came here I was given a stipend. When I was working in Africa I did not have this."

S: Are you able to save a bit while you're here?

"Yeah, absolutely. And also, as you know I have taken the vow of poverty. So half of my stipend goes to my order and then half is given to me for maintenance for my car and all this."

A priest from Ghana says that we should not even compare the two churches and priests in them:

"We live in two different cultures. And I would say problems here cannot be solved like problems in Ghana. Problems in Ghana are different than the problems here. So you can't compare the two churches. I would say that would be a mistake to compare the two churches."

This priest from Kenya described advantages in living conditions and quality of life of a priest in the US:

"Well, here (US) the priests live longer. They are very well taken care of. Here they get a kind of salary. They have a car which I didn't have before. That is really good with the church in America and Europe. In Africa you have one car

that is for everything. It carries the people who are sick in the village, for shopping. In Africa priests very rarely have a day off. I was talking to my pastor when I visited home, Monday is their day off. Because Monday is when they can drive to the city and go for shopping and they call it their day off. And even sometimes on these days parishioners want to meet them. So they work too much.”

Other apparent differences that priests face working in Africa are the numerous social problems present there such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, civil war, and corruption. A priest from Sudan talks about how the Church in Africa and priests address these issues and educate people:

“The Church is trying so much to address these issues but they are still a long way from being over. These issues continue to live so long as people are living as well. And the Church will have to continuously address them as the time goes on. It's true we have a lot of issues of poverty, and this is so because most of our leaders are kind of greedy and they are not really doing their best as leaders and working for the good of the people. Most of them are doing their own thing. If they tried their best from the beginning of Independence it would be different. So you find things are still lacking. So the Church is trying to educate people on all of these issues. But still as I said, so long as people are living most of these problems will continue to occur. But it's much better than before. Around the 80's when HIV was rampant in Africa it was much worse. But because of the persistence of the church in educating the people. Up till now I must say the level has gone down because of the goodness of the Church being so vocal and so prophetic.”

Another quite interesting difference brought up by several priests was the level of respect given to a priest in Africa. The average priest in Africa is looked up to as a leader and holds the status of a political figure, something not afforded the average priest in the US. These responses arose when priests were asked their opinion as to why so many more Africans are entering seminary than Americans. A Nigerian priest describes the honor bestowed upon a family who has a member enter seminary and become a priest:

“I will first of all say that there is no doubt an increase in the number of people going to the seminaries and increase of vocation back home. There is no doubt about that. Apart from saying that these people are entering the family, entering the seminaries, are actually from families who are Catholics. It is also a manifestation of their own faith. And then secondly it is a manifestation of the social status. If you have a family that has a priest, there is some kind of social status for that family. So in terms of before the community and then before the village then it is automatically the family comes, the family that everyone looks up to. It's like preaching the gospel in practice. And not only in priests, but if you also have a family that has a nun it's the same thing. It's like them saying “oh God has blessed you” by God blessing this family and then choosing someone to be a priest or a nun from this family. They also translate that blessing into the whole village. That God has blessed this village, this village has a priest. Or this village has a nun. And then eventually into the whole parish. This parish has a priest or this parish has a nun. Or people might kind of brag about it and say, “Oh, in your parish how many priests do you have? In

my own parish we have 10 priests coming from my parish.” So it’s also a thing of joy of a social status. And then also, something that you can boast about in terms of your own faith. When an evangelist says “faith without real works is empty.” So we can say that we have faith and we have priests, thus real works. Faith and then social status would be the two things that I can identify as the two factors that contribute to an increase.”

A second priest from Nigeria gave similar reasons for the motivation of young men to join the seminary in Africa:

“If I look back to what Africa is, especially Nigeria my country, church is the number one thing for them. They have great respect for the church. If you place the president here and you place a bishop or a priest here, the greater respect would go to the priest, not the president. The way we (priests) are treated in Africa is so motivational. You have caretakers and everything. People truly want to see you as a priest there. You can wear casual clothing here in the U.S., but in Africa we don’t and we can’t go to bars or restaurants or any places where you should not. The parish makes it an obligation to provide everything you need as a priest to be comfortable. If they place you in a parish, the bishop has it that before he pronounces it a parish that parish must have built a rectory for the priest. They will also buy a car and furnish the place for the priest. Even if you come from a poor family, you will probably have a better place to live than them. But once they provide all these things for you, you must be ready for challenges and for big work. You are not just meant to relax, you have to serve the need of the people. I don’t see any priest dying of hunger. Poor people will even donate goods and rice and food to the priest because they really take care of them. If you are elderly they will provide you with a driver to drive you. With cooks and houseboys, we don’t abuse them. They don’t insult us. If any priest comes short of his priestly life, people will call you or tell you to your face what you are doing. They will send you to the bishop. They will prefer to teach you and let you know that what you did is wrong. So in these cases you always have respect. I think that’s one of the things that is motivating young people to go in to the seminary in Africa. I think in my case for vocation what motivated me was the family background that I had, the way my parents brought us up, I never believed that I would be a priest. But here I am, twenty years being happy. If there is anything that I value in my life it is my priesthood. And I will die a Catholic priest.”

The same priest then describes that such respect and treatment is not afforded to priests in the US, therefore affecting calls for vocation:

“And in the case of America here, I have been here for years now. From what I have seen, what is the motivation? You are the young man. What is it that we motivate you to join? Looking at the scandal that has come up here, how people feel about that. So the way so many people here are taking the priesthood to be makes it not so encouraging for young men. And so that’s why you see people leaving the Catholic church. Seeing these things I don’t blame them, but I pray for God to make things right.”

A priest from the Sudan says that such high calls for vocation in Africa are attributed to recruitment methods:

“They preach vocation in Africa a lot. There are lots of religious orders, schools, and missionaries present there. Different diocese come to grade schools there and talk about the different vocations in the church and religious life. So because of that you see this big number of seminarians and young women going into the convent. I attribute that because of the constant vocation information we have going on in Africa. And that is making a huge difference of having so many vocations and really trying to recruit.”

A priest from Ghana states that cultural issues affect the intensity of priestly vocation on both continents:

“I would say this falls also on the same cultural issues because sometimes they say that this is post-evangelization. And Africa is now an evangelizing continent where they are going and spreading their religion. But here people are overcoming their religiosity. People don't want to be religious because something is false or not right. And also you have to be careful, that in Africa religiosity is in their hearts and is part of their culture. So people coming to seminaries and also the population. Nigeria has a large population, bigger than Ghana. They have the Igbos, they are very religious in Nigeria. So they have lot of vocations. Then in Ghana in the north we are very religious, so we have more vocations also in the north. So this is happening because of this and the culture.”

A Kenyan priest gives his personal viewpoint on the level of respect and treatment given to priests in Africa:

“Priests are very respected. Priests and bishops are very valued. And the people really take care of the priests also. Because during the Sunday the people bring their farm produce as part of collection. They come and bring everything that you would normally buy at Wal-Mart here. So it's kind of a social status thing. Now if you go to Africa, you will be surprised the way you will be respected. You will feel something which you have never felt in your country or your home. They want to learn from you and they love you. They want you to feel happy and that you are part of them. They want to make sure that you feel welcome.”

Aside from the cultural differences between the Church in the US and in Africa, the priests interviewed said that the Catholic Church is a universal church. Several made it apparent that the Catholic Church should not be examined or looked at in terms of geographical location, because it is not sovereign to any specific country. Instead the Catholic Church should be looked at as one single entity with no borders. They also considered themselves missionaries to the US, many of them having been trained as missionaries in their seminary studies. When concluding one of the interviews with a Kenyan priest, he was asked to make any final comments. This priest shared how missionaries in the past have influenced his life and Africa and how he is now influencing the lives of others:

“I think what I can add is that I think there is a great appreciation for the church in Africa appreciating the church in Europe and America. For bringing

the word of God down there from the beginning. And educating to the extent that most of us got an education and then I trained to become a priest. Those first missionaries who went to Africa were volunteers. They took challenges, they had fear, they went to a place they knew there was not many resources, no comfort, no water, no electricity. They left their parents and families and comfort in the Western world to go to where there was nothing. Today if we come today to the US it is because of those men and women. Maybe they are now dead. And I also appreciate the Church in the United States, like here in Knoxville, for giving us the opportunity to serve here. Because now I am working here, and what I am paid I'm able to give half of it to go back to my order to train the seminarians in Kenya. And then the little I have I'm able to feed the poor children and poor people back in my home or village. Or even taking another child to school, making a difference. So that is a part which I really appreciate here."

6.3.9 Personal Motivations

These interviews would not have been complete without asking why each person interviewed chose to become a priest. It is apparent that all of these men came from deeply religious backgrounds, which definitely had an impact on their decision. But what is more interesting is that many of the priests gave another common motivational influence for joining the priesthood. These priests interviewed were in contact with missionaries from western countries such as Italy or Ireland as children. These missionaries were looked up to as role models, whom many of the young men wanted to emulate and therefore joined the seminary at an early age. Although responses varied when asked why they chose to become priests, "being like" missionaries or priests they were in contact with as children was one of the most common and remarkable answers. The responses as to why they chose to become priests are as follows:

A Priest from Nigeria-

"Thank you I think that is an interesting question. So many people have asked me that question at least since I have been ordained a priest, this coming December will be my 17th year as a priest. People ask me, "why have you become a priest" and my simple answer is, "I don't know". But what I always do is I tell people a little story. That when I was ordained a priest, I also had a friend who was a classmate and ordained in Rome. So when he came back home I was still at home, I didn't come to the US yet. So I asked him, "Why did you become a priest. Because I followed you, you went to the senior seminary then I followed you." Since my friend is going I'm also coming. And then like our peer group we all went to the senior seminary. So he told me a little story that one day he attended a function at the cathedral back home. He came out of the cathedral and then saw an Irish priest. He saw the Irish priest

standing in the field with a cassock. The wind was blowing that cassock, it was so beautiful for him. My friend then said he had to go to the seminary and put on the cassock so the wind can blow. So that is always the story that I tell people. From that little thing that actually happened that was how God called him to become a priest. And from me, being his friend because my friend is going and I also went to seminary, I always see the hand of God. For him it was through that event, for me it was through my relationship with him as his friend. So I always see that. That is always my own little story I tell people when they ask me why I became a priest.”

A priest from Kenya-

“It's a long story. But when I was young, we used to go to the church. And my father would pray all the time and my grandparents too. So whenever they were going to church my grandma would always pull my hand every morning to wake me up and go to church. Before you go to school, you go to church first. And then my parish was started by missionaries from Holland. They were fathers and nuns and did a lot of work in that place. They built schools and they built a church and then some chapels. They built technical schools. There are so many things the missionaries did. And during mass, we wanted to be serve mass but we were still little. And then we just wanted to be just like them. So you had to wait and grow up to have first communion and then apply to be an altar server. So you'd wait for one year. But we could not wait. We were just so anxious to be there. I think that's what started inspiring me and many boys. So I became an altar server and became a scout and then we would go to visit the sick with the priest. But also the way the priest celebrated mass was just very inspiring. So we wanted to be priests, but we were not entirely sure. And then the nuns would work with us on weekends at the missions, they would give you jobs to do in the schools. So those are the things that kind of influenced me. When I finished 8th grade, my pastor, when we were applying to join minor seminary in my class there were almost 15 boys. So the pastor took us for an interview and right after the interview he told me I had to go to the Apostles of Jesus to be a missionary. I didn't know why. I was scared, but he said no you will go. So he is the one who gave me the form to fill out. The rest of my colleagues he told them to join the diocesan seminary. And so that's how I came to join the Apostles. And as time went on there was this burning fire in me that said yes I would like to be an Apostle, but at the same time I wanted to do something else.”

A priest from Nigeria-

“Well I didn't decide to. I feel it was a vocation. What helped me so much was.. By the way, the motivation came through the exemplary life of my pastor then, was called Father Ben. He loved children and was a very happy priest, very jovial. An exemplary priest to emulate.”

A priest from Ghana-

“Well God calls everybody. So I don't know how to answer this question because I was attracted to the priesthood. I saw the priests how they behaved and dressed. But it's not my own choice. We don't choose priesthood; it is God calls you to the vocation. But maybe when I saw the first priest when I was 8 or 9. He attracted me and from then on.”

A priest from Nigeria-

“First of all my family background, my family was very religious. But it wasn’t just because my family was religious. I think that when every young boy finishes the primary school, they look forward to getting into the secondary school. So I really took an interest to get into the secondary school and I passed the entrance to get in. But then there was my senior, our parish priest, and twice a week he would come to celebrate the mass with the nuns. So it made it easier for us to go to the mass since the parish was so close, only 3 miles away. So with that relationship with the nuns and my senior parish priest, I would help out sometimes with the mass. And so from that he took interest in me and one day he asked me if I would go to the seminary. I didn’t know what the seminary was about. I said, “what is it”. “Oh it’s where you go to learn and be a priest”. I said “no i wouldn’t”. But he said “you have all the qualities, you are a good boy, you know all the students.” So eventually he gave me a form to go to the seminary and told me to give it to my mother and my parents. So I gave it to my mother and she asked me if I wanted to go to the seminary, but I said I don’t know. I’m looking forward to going to the secondary school. I’m so excited because my friends are also going to go there. But then one day in the afternoon my parents called me and I came and my parents said if I want to go to seminary that I should apply. And I could hear in my mother’s voice that she would like me to do this. And for me I love my mother and I would do anything for her, so I said yes I will! So I applied and on the day of the exams they took me to the cathedral and I took the exams. There I saw many young bright boys, who I was told were seminarians. So I was impressed by them and how they looked and behave and I took the exams. The results came and I found out I passed the exams. But I still had to take another exam in the seminary to weed out more people so they have enough accommodations, cause they wanted only the best students for seminary. So that morning my dad brought me to the seminary, there were English tests, math, science; they even had us play soccer cause they wanted to know that we were physically fit and everything! So after that the results came back in the evening and I found out I passed. And so I became even more excited when it was like survival of the fittest. So that was part of it. So with my family background, with the help of my mother, with the help of God, through my pastor, all of this made it possible for me to get into the seminary.”

A priest from the Sudan-

“It’s a good question. You know it’s a calling to become a priest. But how I got my motivation was one day I jumped to these Italian priests, you know we were evangelized by missionaries from Italy. So they were missionaries who came to our place and evangelized to us. And I saw them wearing their traditional clothing and I just got attracted to that. And one time after mass on Sunday I went to this priest and told him I wanted to be just like him, I was an altar boy. I told him I wanted to be just like him and he said ok. He told my mom to nurture this vocation because it was the right thing for me and fit me. But my desire was just through this and seeing the priests wearing their cassocks all the time.”

6.4 Interview Summary

The interviews with the African priests were able to provide valuable information that could not otherwise be found in academic journals or scholarly literature. Biographical data, life experiences relating to the Catholic Church, and personal opinions all proved quite useful for the research. As stated earlier in the chapter, there were four primary objectives that were to be answered after completing the interview process. The first objective was to determine the motivation for Africans to join the priesthood. Based on the results of the interviews there are several conclusions that can be made. All of the priests interviewed were raised in Catholic families where religion played a vital role to the structure of the family unit. The majority of these families were exposed to Catholicism via missionaries from foreign countries, primarily those of Europe. The decision for the priests to enter seminary was made at an early age, generally between the ages of 8 and 12. The priests themselves sighted these reasons being due to their exposure to religion by their family and also a desire to emulate priests they observed as children. But the most interesting theme gathered from these responses for motivation to join the priesthood was that of the missionary influence. The priests looked up to and idolized missionaries from foreign countries working in their communities and wanted to be like them. Thus the theme and concept of the missionary proved an important factor right from the start.

The second objective of the interview section was to determine the intentions for these priests to live and work in the US. The term “economic migrant” is often used in the US when referring to foreign priests.⁹³ The assumption therein is that these priests are moving to the US solely for the advantage of a high salary and better living conditions. This assumption may indeed be partly true for some priests moving to the US. Several of the priests interviewed for this research admitted that they do make a salary living in the US and that half of their salary is

⁹³ In the article *African Priests Abroad: Economic Migrants or Evangelizers*, African priest and Catholic theologian Laurenti Magesa reports on the Vatican’s 2001 publication of the document *Instruction on the Sending Abroad and Sojourn of Diocesan Priests from Mission Territories*. Magesa’s article questions the intentions of missionary priests from developing countries and cites a passage from the Vatican’s document which states, “Often their (priests from developing countries) motives are based on higher living conditions which these countries offer.” The basis for Magesa’s article is in fact in response to what he claims is the Vatican’s concern regarding such priestly migration, where he states: “Rome is alarmed at the number of Diocesan priests from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania living and serving in pastoral capacities in Europe and North America. Many of them go to the West as students only to extend their period of study indefinitely while serving in parishes. Others become fully integrated in direct pastoral ministry.” Magesa, *African*, 2001.

sent to their home dioceses in Africa.⁹⁴ However, using the label of “economic migrant” to describe the sole purpose for these priests coming to the US would be a fallacious mistake. The majority of the priests interviewed did not have a say in the matter and were sent by their bishops after making arrangements with the dioceses’ bishops in the US. Perhaps a more appropriate label to bestow upon some of these priests would be “educational migrants”, since many of them completed a level of university education in the US. This western education will most likely even serve to benefit the respective priest’s home country, as he may move back to Africa and teach in a seminary.

The third objective for the interview portion of the research was to establish differences between the Catholic Church in Africa and in the US. From the answers given it became apparent that the priests agreed that the Catholic Church is universally the same, with the differences instead bound in the culture and history of a given region. Social problems such as poverty and health made the working environments different for the priests as well as the general mindsets of parishioners in each country.

The final objective was to ascertain whether these priests can be considered as missionaries and if this is a process of reverse missions. One conclusion that can be made from this analysis is that the concept of what a missionary is has changed over time. These priests can be considered missionaries, and they do consider themselves as such. However, they do not come from imperial or hegemonic empires with the aim to colonize a land or people. Nor do they come for the purpose of converting a society from an “inferior” system of beliefs. Instead, these modern-day missionaries come to evangelize in the same country that once helped introduce the concept of missions.

⁹⁴ One priest stated that his monthly salary was US\$ 1,000/month in addition to a living allowance which provides for accommodation. Thus this priest would sent home US\$500/month to his home diocese in Africa.

7 Conclusion

The limits and successes of this research can only be realized when one considers the apparent scale of such an endeavor. Although this phenomenon of “reverse-missions” has only been analyzed at a microcosmic level of its true global significance, a great deal of time and expense has been spent to reach these results. Having had the financial assistance of a research travel grant saw this project through to its completion. The interview portion of this research produced results that enabled this paper to move in a direction otherwise not possible with such references. Analyzing reverse-missions from the perspective of African priests gives the researcher valuable insight into a phenomenon that has been afforded limited prior analysis.

It is my hope that this research may be used as a building block for more expansive projects in the future. With more time and funding, it would be beneficial to interview larger sample sizes of priests and bishops, in both the US and Africa. In order to truly understand the differences and similarities between African priesthood and American priesthood, visiting seminaries and local religious communities in African countries may well be beneficial. Such research could help shed light on the Catholic Church’s impact with regard to social life outside of the church. How does religious life affect secular life and can it be used as a tool to promote social justice? Also, looking through the lens of international development, what is the role of the priest and religious community? Education, healthcare, foreign aid and human rights are several facets of international development. But can factors such as morals, ethics and religion also be considered when referring to foreign priests’ role in developing the global north? These are just some of many approaches that could be used to expound upon this research.

The previous chapters in this research have examined certain aspects of the Catholic Church and global Christianity from various perspectives. An assessment of this nature can give a brief but important insight into the current state of global religion. In doing so, this provided a set of historical, sociological, and biological narratives that helped to further understand the reverse-mission process. Although the Catholic Church is united universally by doctrine, it is at the same time comprised of numerous cultural and historical variables spread across a wide playing field. It is such variables that create levels of variation on a geographic scale. One of the most obvious examples of this, and a common theme throughout this research, is the transference of Christianity’s core from

the global north to the global south. Missions have and continue to play influential roles in this shift from north to south.

With regards to the research question of what motivational factors influence African priests to join the priesthood, several assumptions can be made. These men have been raised in environments where Christianity plays a central role. They have been surrounded by the teachings of this religion in family and educational settings. The historical analysis of this research has shown that such religious environments can be linked to the extensive efforts that have sought to spread Christianity throughout Africa. Colonization, missions, and culture combined with the partially indigenous status of Christianity in parts of Africa helped create the present environment that is conducive to motivate young men join the priesthood. One of the most fascinating aspects that have motivated many young Africans to become priests is their direct contact with foreign missionaries, whom they have admired and wished to emulate. This is quite noteworthy because it provides a direct example of the effects of missions in Africa and how they have in turn influenced the reverse-mission process.

A clear difference can be seen between the nature of the priesthood in the US and in Africa. Priests from Africa report that in their countries, the community in which they live places a different level of admiration towards their priestly roles. They are in a way regarded as a type of community leader and educator, who is able to influence both the religious and secular lives of his parishioners. The amount of time and devotion these men invest to become a priest makes it a highly competitive and revered vocation. To achieve such an accomplishment instills a sense of pride and honor in the priest's family. Therefore, these men achieve a social-status that appears to be unfounded among priests in the US. These reasons provide strong insight into the motivations for African men to join the priesthood as well as the contrasting lack thereof for men in the US.

If this research has proven anything, it has given evidence to the possibility that Christianity is not a "white-man's" religion exclusive to the Western world, nor is it a religion on the decline. From a Western perspective, religion appears to be on a decline due to rising secularism and progressions. However, from a global perspective what we see is not only a shift, but also an increase in piety. Thus an important question is this: In the long run, who will benefit from this process of reverse missions? At its current stage, both sides are winning. The Catholic Church in the US is filling vacancies and the Church in Africa is employing those in need of jobs. However, for the long term affects it could be said that Africa will benefit more, in that its educational

system and economy will be strengthened as byproducts to the overseas mission processes. African missionaries are not building schools or houses for the US; they are bringing a new ideology, a strong sense of piety, and a different way of life and culture. Arguably, they are also bringing with them a renewed sense of conservatism that stands in opposition to the current American religious/political landscape. In exchange, as gathered from the interviews of this research, these African missionaries are receiving a salary and quite often higher academic university degrees (although not free of charge). Many priests invest their salaries and education back into their respective home dioceses in Africa. Money is sent to the home dioceses and after some years many of the priests will return to Africa to carry out pedagogical roles either in a university or seminary. Only time and further research will articulate the magnitude of the effect such endeavors will have on economic and educational development in Africa.

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Appendix A

A.1 General Interview Question Template

- 1 What is your name?
- 2 How old are you?
- 3 Where were you born?
- 4 How long have you lived in the US?
 - A. In this specific parish?
- 5 What language is your mother tongue?
 - A. Your father's?
 - B. Your mother's?
- 6 Please tell me a bit about your family background.
- 7 Where did you study growing up?
 - A. In what language did you study?
- 8 Where did you attend seminary?
 - A. In what language did you study?
- 9 When were you ordained?
- 10 Why did you choose to become a priest?
- 11 Tell me about your ecclesiastical career prior to moving to the US.
- 12 Please explain why and how you came to work in the US?
- 13 What did the process entail for you to come abroad to the US? Any difficulties?
- 14 What's an average day of work like for you here? In Africa?
- 15 Would you say your duties are the same or different as an American priest?
- 16 Have you encountered any difficulties with language in the US (difficulty understanding parishioners or them having difficulty understanding you)?
- 17 Have you ever encountered problems due to your nationality or skin color in the US?
- 18 Are you content working here?
- 19 What is your opinion on the Catholic Church's stance regarding controversial issues such as sex, divorce, and marriage? And how they apply to priests.
- 20 What do you think about the current Pope Benedict XVI?
- 21 What do you think about the possibility of an African Pope in the future?
- 22 Over the past several years, the Catholic Church has received much negative publicity in the media. Can you comment on this? What is your opinion on such negative light that is being directed towards the Church?
- 23 What differences (if any) do you see in the Church in the US and the Church in Africa?
- 24 What about any differences between US parishioners and African parishioners?
 - A. Does the Church play the same or different roles in the life of an American as opposed to an African?

- 25 What about the average life and roles of priests such as yourself working in the US versus back home in Africa?
- 26 There are numerous social problems that are present in Africa that are not as widespread or less intense in the US (poverty, HIV/AIDS, corruption). Do you feel the Church has taken an active role in addressing such issues and how does that make your working life different in Africa as opposed to the US?
- 27 Many statistics show that church attendance rates are falling in the US, but yet rising in Africa. There are also many more Africans entering seminary than Americans. Do you have any opinion from your experience as to why this may be?
- 28 Is there an appropriate representation of African cardinals in the Church today?
- 29 Do you consider yourself a missionary?
- 30 Lastly, do you plan to return to Africa?
- 31 Anything else you would like to say?

Appendix B

B.1 Interview Transcriptions

Interview 1

Date: 14 April 2011

Location: St. Mary's Catholic Church. Johnson City, TN

S: I just want to start out and ask what is your name?

AA: My name is Aniete Akata

S: Where were you born?

AA: In Nigeria

S: And what part of Nigeria?

AA: That is the southern part of the country, it is a country located in west Africa. Is called Akwa Ibom states. The country has 36 states so Akwa Ibom is one of the states in the country and is located in the south.

S: How old are you?

AA: This year I will be 46.

S: How long have you been living in the US?

AA: 11 years.

S: And how long have you been in this parish?

AA: Yeah, actually in this parish I have been here for 7 years. Here in St. Mary's parish.

S: And, a bit more about your background. What language were you raised speaking as a child? What's your mother tongue?

AA: Yeah, I was raised speaking Annang, A-N-N-A-N-G.

S: And did both of your parents speak Annang?

AA: They do, they do.

S: Ok, would you mind to tell me a bit about your family background? Where your parents are from? Or if you were raised in the Christian faith?

A: Yeah, actually I was born into a Catholic family. Both of my parents, who are still alive today, are Catholics. They were married and wedded in the church. So I grew up in that family. And, a family of five; three boys and then two girls. Then I started primary 1 by going with my father from one school to another, one school to another. Cause my father was a teacher in the Catholic school, but he was also the station teacher. What the Irish missionaries did, the way of evangelization, everywhere that you find a teacher teaching in the school he would also be the station teacher. In other

words, maybe five o'clock in the morning you would open the church for people to come for morning prayer and then it's eight o'clock and he goes to school and then teaches. So I moved with him from one school to another all through the six years of primary 1-6. The only year I was not with him was the last year which was, umm... no it was one year, it was my primary five while he was the head master in the primary school, like high school here in the United States. And that was the only year I stayed with my mother, and then I was doing primary 5.

S: So your father was a headmaster in the school?

AA: Yes, he was. But at the initial stage when I was doing my primaries 1-3 he was the Deputy Headmaster teaching primary 6. Then when I was doing primaries 4, 5 and 6 he became the Headmaster then retired as a headmaster.

S: And was it a private or public school?

AA: Yes, a private school.

S: A Catholic school I imagine?

AA: Yeah, yeah. Elementary Catholic school all through.

S: What was the language you studied in? Was it also Annang or English or..?

AA: The language that we had and vernacular we were taught was Annang. And then since Nigeria was colonized by Britain the official language of the country, the lingua franca, is English. Which is spoken by 90% of the country, there is the only way you can use to communicate because of so many tribes that we have. You can only communicate in English.

S: Did you attend seminary in Nigeria as well?

AA: Yes I did. Both my junior seminary, which is like High School here, classes 1-5. And then finished that, and then did my Philosophy four years and got my bachelors then did my theology four years then also got my bachelors then after that I was ordained a deacon then ordained a priest.

S: Was your school also in the same town you went to primary school in?

AA: Yeah, the junior seminary wasn't in the same town but the same local government area, like the same county here in the US.

S: So why did you choose to become a priest?

AA: Thank you I think that is an interesting question. So many people have asked me that question at least since I have been ordained a priest, this coming December will be my 17th year as a priest. People ask me why have you become a priest and my simple answer is I don't know.

S: That's a good answer.

AA: But what I always do is I tell people a little story. That when I was ordained a priest, I also had a friend who was a classmate and ordained in Rome. So when he came back home I was still at home, I didn't come to the US yet. So I asked him "why did you become a priest. because I followed you, you went to the senior seminary then I followed you. Since my friend is going I'm also coming. And then like our peer group we all went to the senior seminary." So he told me a little story that one day he attended a function at the cathedral back home. He came out of the cathedral and then saw an Irish priest. He saw the Irish priest standing in the field with a cassock. The wind was blowing that cassock, it was so beautiful for him. He then said I have to go to the seminary and put on the cassock so the wind can blow. So that is always the story that I tell people. From that little thing that actually happened that was how God called him to become a priest. And from me, being his friend because my friend is going and I also went to seminary, I always see the hand of God. For him it was through that event, for

me it was through my relationship with him as his friend. So I always see that. That is always my own little story I tell people when they ask me why I became a priest.

S: And the language of study during seminary?

AA: It was English all through.

S: Tell me a bit about your ecclesiastical career after you finished seminary.

AA: After my seminary studies and ordination I worked as the assistant secretary to the secretary to our bishop, then was also the assistant manager to one of the primary schools, then was also the assistant financial administrator, was also in charge of the secretariat, then was also then chaplain to the secondary school, then was also a member of the Bible society of Nigeria. So this was what I did shortly after my ordination. Then I was transferred to the Junior Seminary where I actually studied. So I taught systematic handwriting, I also taught ethics, then was also the bookkeeper in the seminary. I was there in the seminary for three years before the Bishop asked me to come over to the US for studies.

S: So that was actually my next question, why and how did you come to the US?

AA: I did not choose, the Bishop chose. Normally every diocese, if someone, if a priest is to go out for studies the bishop is always the one to ask you to go, and then gives you permission. So when you come over to the US, if you are attached to a parish or to a diocese your bishop back home will have to give a letter stating that you are in good standing with the church of the diocese to the bishop of the diocese that you are going. So while you are studying there, the bishop of the diocese where you are going can give you also at least a place of residence, then you can also help in the parish when you are going to school.

S: Ok. And you came straight to Tennessee or did you come somewhere else first?

AA: I did not. When I came from Nigeria I went straight to New York, I was in St. John's University there. That was where I did my masters.

S: Ok, so you studied at the University in New York. And were you also working in the church at the same time?

AA: Yes I was also helping in the parish at the same time.

S: Were there any difficulties in coming here to the US? Such as getting a Visa or immigration procedures.

AA: The only difficulty that I encountered was in terms of the duration of time. They will invite you to come for the interview, when you apply for a visa they might give you three months or sometimes four, sometimes six. Then you go and line up with the rest of the people, like in Nigeria there are always so many people that are going to the American embassy for the Visa. So I went, they interviewed me and then looked at all my documents and then looked at the form I-20 that the University sent to me. And then also saw the place of residence that I was going to reside. Also had a letter from the diocese that I was going to reside where I was going to school. So there was no major difficulty in terms of them denying me the visa. Then they saw that I already had bought the ticket. Then they saw the letter from my home bishop that it wasn't something that I did on my own to come. So all there was for them was to ask me a few questions and then I got the visa.

S: How long were you in NY?

AA: I was in NY for three years and two weeks.

S: And then you came to Tennessee?

AA: Yes I came to Johnson City, the first port of call was that I served at the VA. I was doing my one year clinical pastoral education at the VA and this was the parish that I

lived. So after that one year clinical pastoral education, the diocese assigned me here as there associate pastor. Then I also got admission, cause eventually I wanted to finish up and then do my doctorate before going back home, so I got admission. Then communicated with my Bishop back home that I've succeeded in getting admission for the doctorate. So I got admission into East Tennessee State University and did my doctorate. When I finished the coursework that was when the Bishop asked me to go to Signal Mountain which is in the Chattanooga area. And the priest there was going to Iraq so I would go there to go and help and stay there as the administrator of the parish for one year. And then when the pastor here whom I assisted went back to Ireland, the bishop said since I was already here it would be better for me to come back and serve here. So I went back, I came back and served here. All together in the diocese of Knoxville I have been here for eight years, out of that seven years at St. Mary's.

S: And coming from NY to Tennessee, was that a decision made by the bishop in NY?

AA: No, it was not. Yeah, it was from me because I was looking for a place whereby I get admission and also have scholarship for the doctorate. So if I had gotten admission maybe in a University in California for the doctorate or in Houston or in Minnesota or anywhere, that would have been something that at least propelled me to move there. But all these inquiries that you keep on doing, the main person that you need to keep informed is your bishop back home so that he knows where you are, and if you need a letter for the bishop of the local diocese there, then your bishop at home can always send a letter to him.

S: And what did you get your PhD in?

AA: It's in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

S: How would you describe an average day of work for you here in St Mary's?

AA: Basically, in terms of the hours it wouldn't be less than eight hours because you begin by celebrating morning mass. In fact this is the only parish in the diocese that has two masses every morning. Here we have 7 o'clock and then we also have 8:30. There are also some days that will have a 12 noon mass at the VA because the VA is also under the services of the priests here. Then there are also some weeks that will have mass at the nursing home. So you begin mass at 7 in the morning, then 8:30, and then you go out with the parish nurses to visit those who are home bound, and you can also visit those who are in the hospitals. Then you can also respond to calls or you visit those who are in the nursing homes.

S: So it sounds like it differs from day to day.

AA: Yeah, that is correct.

S: Would you say that your duties in the church here are the same as an American priest? Are you given the same roles and responsibilities as a priest born in the US?

AA: I do, I do feel that way here.

S: How would you describe an average day of work for you in Africa?

AA: Being a priest is much more demanding and intense in terms of the number of people that might line up to see you back home. So sometimes in a particular day you might have 20 to 30 people lining up to see you. They make so many requests, they ask you to pray for them, they can even ask for you to come to their families and pray for them there. Those who are coming to ask for financial help or to come and ask for food, especially the raw food, especially if it is the Sunday service, because back home when the people are bringing there offering they bring the raw food to you like bags of yam, cassava, or live chicken, or furniture. They bring these and give them to you every first Sunday of the month. So there are some families that are not so well to do, so that

after the Sunday services they come to the rectory or go to see the priest, and the priest, especially most of the perishable food you have to give them to some of these families to help them. So I would say the average work load back home in Africa is much more intensive than here. But it might also depend on the parish. For me comparatively, the parish I am here St Mary's is with over 1,200 families is also very demanding. It's very demanding. We also have an outreach station at Unicoi that we go there to serve the Hispanic community. The Hispanic community is also a big community here. Then in addition St. Mary's also has a school, so that is also additional work. There are some parishes in the diocese that do not have schools.

S: Have you ever encountered any difficulties with the language here, either being understood or understanding people here in the parish?

AA: Yeah, it has. There are times that people tell me I should speak slowly, that they do not understand. I try to pay attention to that and also speak very slowly. Then there are also times that I do not understand them, especially in the South, the southern drawl, "how are ya'll". It took me some time to keep on thinking and what they are always asking is, oh, "how are you all". But gradually with listening, when I listen I understand people very well.

S: So since you've been here for 11 years I guess you've gotten used to all the different words and phrases.

AA: Yes, I have.

S: Have you ever encountered any problems or difficulties being African in a predominantly white community or parish?

AA: Not so much so drastic, but in a subtle way. Yeah, I have to pay attention to all that. To the cultural issues. No one has ever come out so openly to say he or she does not want to talk to me because I am an African, no one has ever done that. But at least as a grown-up you can also pick out certain things, maybe certain nuances or body language or certain things that are done or some silence or some expression on the face. Or you drive on the road and then someone sees you, since there are not so many African-Americans, then they come to know you are serving in the parish. But I have never encountered any major withdrawal or rejection. I have not.

S: Are you content working here?

AA: I am. I'm very happy with my work.

S: Now I'm going to move a little bit and talk about the Catholic Church in general. So I wanted to ask you what is your opinion on the Catholic Church's stance regarding issues such as sex, divorce, and marriage. And specifically priests not marrying or having sex. What are your opinions on that?

AA: Yeah, I firmly believe in what the church teaches and that is not something I'm coming to know because I'm a priest. I was already taught that; that you knew about this before you actually accepted to become a priest, that this is something you are going to give up because of the service that you are doing as a priest. So I do not see any problem about that.

S: What do you think about the current pope, Benedict XVI?

AA: My only opinion about the pope is that he is very pastoral. I like his writings, I like his way of governance, especially trying to reach out to as many people as possible.

S: Do you see think there is a future for an African Pope?

AA: Yeah with God anything is possible, I'm not ruling out that. But it's not a major issue for me to begin and say this is what the Church needs or this is what the world needs. It's not an issue. If the time comes and that becomes possible, it may be in my

lifetime it might not be. Just as maybe you asked my thirty years ago if I see the future of an American president being an African-American. Anything is possible.

S: In the past few years, the Catholic Church has received quite a bit of negative publicity in the mainstream media. Can you comment on this? What's your opinion on the negative light that has been directed towards the Catholic Church?

AA: Maybe you want to explain a little bit what you mean.

S: Regarding priests in the Church being accused of child molestation.

AA: Yeah, my reaction would be pastoral. While I welcome the report from the media and also sympathize with the victims. We pray for the victims and those involved in all that and then we pray for the Church generally. I'm not against the media, that the media should not have brought all this out. Again, my approach would be pastoral, praying for the media and for the victims to recover what they have gone through, and then praying for the church and then praying for those that were also involved.

S: Do you see any differences between the Church in Africa and the Church in the US, from your experiences?

AA: Yeah, I have. The first one would be in terms of the number of attendants, the number of people coming to church. Like back home, the number of people coming to attend an average morning mass wouldn't be less than 50-60. And then morning mass is also very early at 6 am. Then some people go from mass to work. And then during the Sunday services, when you are conducting the Sunday services, they would be at least 2-3 hours. But here in the US you have to keep to one hour. And as I mentioned, during the offertory collection, parishioners come out and they dance and bring their offering to come give, but here it's not the same. And then back home, very rarely do we celebrate Sunday services on Saturday evening. Every Sunday service is on Sunday, whether we have 2 or 3 or 4 masses it's on Sunday including evening masses. But here in the US, under the parishes I've served they always have Sunday services on Saturday at 5pm.

S: That's actually related to my next question, regarding US parishioners and African parishioners. How would you describe the differences in the two and the role the Church plays in their lives?

AA: I would say the role that the church plays is the same. The only thing that would differ, what are the responses on the part of the parishioners or on the part of the people coming in to the local community. So that might also have to do with culture. When you pay attention to culture, culture is a way of life. I mean the culture here is also what is affecting the way people respond to the church services. So the culture back home is also what is affecting the way people are responding to church services. But the role of the church is the same.

S: Ok, and what about priests in the US and in Africa. Would you say that the role and life of a priest in the US is the same or different as that of a priest in Nigeria?

AA: Yeah, it would not be the same. There is no way it can be the same. Comparatively, maybe for me, the responsibilities that I had back home are definitely not the same with the responsibilities that I have here. Over there the responsibilities would be much, while over here while the responsibilities would also be much its kind of identified with the services that I have here. But back home as I was teaching in the seminary and then also serving under as the secretary of the bishop my responsibilities extended to all the parishes. Back then we did not have cell phones getting to the parishes, but now we do. So if the bishop had a message for all the priests I would literally drive to all the parishes to leave those messages and then as well as some years

later keep driving and delivering any messages. But here it's not the same, cause I'm very restricted to the parish here. If there is anything that I need to do the hardest thing would be I need to make a phone call or send out an email. So I think the responsibilities change depending on the time and then on the development and technology.

S: Ok, next question. There are numerous social problems in the US that are not as widespread or less intense as in Africa, such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, corruption among others. Do you feel that the church is taking an active role in addressing these issues?

AA: I do. Yeah, the church, not only the church here but the church in Africa. But it is still a challenge. So the church is doing its own part. I always say that it might also be good for the civil governance to also do some part, especially when you talk about corruption. The politicians back home, when they syphon the money then they take it to the wells and then the government in those countries will allow them to put those money in the banks. So the government should also be discouraging this. So that also when the church is doing its own part back home, the civil community needs to also do its part. Even the church back home, actually the priests speaking from the pulpit and writing letters. That is one side. But actually implementing and checking corruption and holding people accountable, we also call on the civil society to do that. And then I also encourage as many priests as possible, don't be afraid just continue to speak about it and stand for what the gospel values stand.

S: I guess this obviously makes your working life different from what you just mentioned with what you just mentioned about these various social problems and they present different challenges.

AA: It does. In terms of poverty there's no doubt about that. Because with the opportunity I've had to visit home, having stayed here. There's no doubt that there's a major difference back home. I had the opportunity to go with one of my teachers, who had never been to the African continent. So when he visited I took him to some communities and he saw the children. So for him it was an opportunity to visit and actually see in person, made a greater impact so that I did not need to say anything or speak about it. He kind of saw it and said, "Oh look at what we are taking for granted back here." The fact that some communities can sustain without clean water or the fact that they can not even be able to afford a loaf of bread. So these are some of the things that people take for granted here. Or you buy food, you don't even finish eating it and you throw it away. So the poverty is really an issue, it's a fact. But again, it can't only be the role of the Church but the civil society that also helps by reaching out to these communities.

S: There are a lot of statistics that show that church attendance rates are falling in the US but rising in Africa. There are obviously too a lot more Africans entering seminary than Americans entering seminary in the US. Do you have any opinions why this may be?

AA: I will first of all say that there is no doubt an increase in the number of people going to the seminaries and increase of vocation back home. There is no doubt about that. Apart from saying that these people are entering the family, entering the seminaries, are actually from families who are Catholics. It is also a manifestation of their own faith. And then secondly it is a manifestation of the social status. If you have a family that has a priest, there is some kind of social status for that family. So in terms of before the community and then before the village then it is automatically the family comes, the family that everyone looks up to. It's like preaching the gospel in practice.

And not only in priests, but if you also have a family that has a nun it's the same thing. It's like them saying "oh God has blessed you" by God blessing this family and then choosing someone to be a priest or a nun from this family. They also translate that blessing into the whole village. That God has blessed this village, this village has a priest. Or this village has a nun. And then eventually into the whole parish. This parish has a priest or this parish has a nun. Or people might kind of brag about it and say, "Oh, in your parish how many priests do you have? In my own parish we have 10 priests coming from my parish." So it's also a thing of joy of a social status. And then also, something that you can boast about in terms of your own faith. When an evangelist says "faith without real works is empty." So we can say that we have faith and we have priests, thus real works. Faith and then social status would be the two things that I can identify as the two factors that contribute to an increase.

S: Would you say the social status also affects the financial status of the family too?

AA: Yes that would also be applicable.

S: So a family may have a priest or nun in their family and they may be compensated better financially?

AA: Um, the only way you can talk in terms of financial compensation would be if a parish has a priest, when that priest is about to celebrate his first mass the whole parish will contribute and then buy a car for that priest. So at least that first major encounter is taken care of, so the whole parish is one. So that is the only aspect of compensation. But in terms of actually receiving a monthly stipend or allowance as is done here in the US, we do not have that setup back home. So priests are not actually paid monthly as it is done here. Where you receive your stipend is from the tray collection that the people give every first Sunday. Parishes will have two tray collections, one will be for the parish and one will be for the priest. But here it is not set up that way, it is set up in such a way that the priest receives the monthly stipend. Then in addition to the tray collection that the priest receives back home, people also bring food items as I said, and give them to the priest.

S: Speaking of the number of priests coming from Africa, do you feel that there is an appropriate representation of African cardinals in the Church?

AA: I do not think. I wouldn't even say in terms of representation because I'm trying to guard against the political implication and speak for democracy, that the church is democratic. I wouldn't say it from that perspective that I need to have so many cardinals in order for the Church in Africa to be represented. Yeah I will leave that to the work of the Holy Spirit and then to the Pope. As the Pope sees the need for that he can appoint cardinals and even bishops.

S: That was my last question. Do you have any final comment?

AA: The only thing is that I enjoy my priesthood, I enjoy serving here in the United States and whenever I go home I also enjoy serving there at home. So I am happy as a priest.

S: One more question actually. Do you plan to return to Africa?

AA: Yes I do. I do

S: Father thank you very much.

AA: You're very welcome.

Interview 2

Date: 2 May 2011

Location: Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Nashville, TN

S: So I just want to start out and ask what is your name?

A: My name is Reverend Athanasius Chidi Abanulo

S: Athanasius, does that come from the Athanasian creed?

A: Yeah it does.

S: Did you choose this name or was it a given name?

A: It was a given name. Because my country is so much in touch with Christianity and Catholicism. Every name they give has something to reflect our faith. Be it the English name or the middle name. Like my brothers and sisters in our family, every name they have our parents chose for us and are the names of saints.

S: When were you born?

A: Well I was born on the 4th of September 1959 in Nigeria.

S: Ok, that was my next question. Where in Nigeria were you born?

A: In Imo State. It is the eastern part of Nigeria. The southern part.

S: What language is your native language?

A: It's Igbo.

S: What are your parents native languages?

A: Yeah, they speak Igbo also.

S: And how long have you been living in the US?

A: I came to the US in 2003 officially. But I've been coming as far back as 2000 and even prior to that and spent my vacation here. But I've been here permanently since 2003.

S: And how long have you been in this specific parish?

A: I've been in Nashville Diocese since 2006. Working at Immaculate Conception for almost 4 years and then having my area in hospital ministry which I did at Vanderbilt here. The Bishop here now asked me to take up the responsibility for the hospital ministry for the diocese of Nashville. So since two years now I have accepted this responsibility and that's why I have relocated here.

S: Can you tell me a bit more about your family background. What did your parents do? How many siblings did you have?

A: My parents. My dad was a farmer originally before he went into trading. He traded in tobacco, he imported tobacco from overseas into the country Nigeria. And then exported palm cane oil. That was what he predominantly did. He died in 1986 at the age of 82. And then we lost one of us a few months ago, the second daughter Nora. I have 5 brothers and 4 sisters. One of the sisters is gone and my dad is gone. The grandchildren, as of last year is 48 or 49. And great-grandchildren are 50. And out of this, three have already been ordained priests excluding myself. In my family now we have a lot of us in the priesthood.

S: So that's related to my next question. Were you raised as a child in a Christian upbringing?

A: Very strong Christian upbringing. I joined the seminary at the age of 12 years. Throughout my lifetime, junior seminary. Then went to philosophy campus and did my 4 years in philosophy. Did my orientation by teaching at a seminary. Then went to Bigard Memorial Seminary, the biggest seminary, before my ordination. Because of the boom of vocation in Nigeria now there are so many other seminaries other than Bigard. The call for vocation in my country is great, especially in my diocese.

S: Can you tell me a bit more about the Bigard Seminary. Was it primarily Nigerians there? Or international?

A: No, as of the time we are in the seminary in was predominantly the Nigerians and a few others that came from other places. But because we have this boom of vocation in Nigeria now, there is not so much room for outsiders. The seminary is very competitive. It's either you are a good seminarian to come up with good priests or you are not. You have to do your best, there is no half-priest. It's either you are there intellectually and physically, all of that which is needed to have a balanced priest to come up with being a good priest.

S: So there are many tests you have to take?

A: Of course. Many tests. The level set for us was so high. You know the training you have to go through for here, they will call it abuse for all of the work we have to do to train ourselves. To give our input then, we use it and it has been so helpful. Twenty years I have been a priest now.

S: When were you ordained?

A: 1990

S: And the language of instruction was English?

A: It was English, yeah. And within the course of my priesthood I have been able to embrace some other languages. I speak French now because I went on mission to Chad Republic, learned there native language and because of the society there was Muslim I also had to learn a little bit of Arabic. Coming down here to the States to you get a lot of Spanish speaking people. When I was in Oakland Diocese working for them I started a little bit of Spanish. I can say Mass now in Spanish and communicate, but not fluently as I do in French.

S: Why did you choose to become a priest?

A: Well I didn't decide to. I feel it was a vocation. What helped me so much was.. By the way, the motivation came through the exemplary life of my pastor then, was called Father Ben. He loved children and was a very happy priest, very jovial. An exemplary priest to emulate.

S: And where was he from?

A: From Nigeria. So the way he related with us inspired me, and I thought of being Father Ben. That was how I told them. Every day my family made it obligatory for us to attend morning Mass despite the distance from our family to the church. We had to go every day. So coming in contact with this man, sometimes to have breakfast with him that was motivation. Then the family background was of great importance to my vocation. Because we are so religious. We couldn't have our breakfast if we didn't go to morning Mass. So that gives you an idea where we come from. That was one of the factors that helped me in being who I am today.

S: Please explain to me the process of you coming to the US. Why were you chosen to come here?

A: Well in the year 2000 my bishop had a request from Chad Republic for a priest from Nigeria to come and help in the diocese there. I volunteered to go there. While this was

about to take place, the bishop declared our diocese a missionary diocese, because we had a lot of priests, more than we need. So that entails you could be asked anytime to go and help diocese that are in need of priests. One of the remarkable comments he made was that this country was not like Europe, its not like America, it's a country totally different. So he wouldn't just appoint anyone to go, and if I want to volunteer I should do it. So two of us went there and I learned a lot. What we learned there you never get in any book, it's an experience that enriched our lives. It's a country run by muslims, and there are very poor people. I never imagined in my life what it meant to be in such a poor country. So that was how my missionary life started. And from time to time I would come to Nigeria in order to get help and assist the church there. So I worked there for 3 years in a parish there. So after the 3 years, my bishop was so impressed that I opened that door for others because they were afraid to go. So he said "feel free anywhere you want to go to continue with your mission and your studies." So he suggested I go to France, because I now speak French. But because I was more used to coming to America, I felt more comfortable coming here. So he said, "Ok anywhere you want to, I will endorse your going." So I went to the US. The first place I came for work was in Louisiana. I stayed there for a couple of months, then applied to Phoenix diocese. While I was waiting for them to prepare my materials I went to Oakland to visit my cousin. One of the nuns saw me there and heard my English and said "where are you from, you speak good English". And I said, "well thank you." And I told her my mission and she said they needed priests there in Oakland. She was the Chancellor of the Diocese, and she went and told the bishop there and they asked me to come over the next day. Before you knew it they had me make an agreement and everything and contacted my Bishop. So I stayed there a while then I went to Phoenix. One month staying there I couldn't stand the heat. It was so hot for me. Then I said goodbye because I had the option to go to Oakland, immediately they gave me a parish there. So I served in three or four parishes during the time I was there for almost four years. And I was made the chaplain of the Nigerian Catholic Community. That was one of the challenges I had, to develop a Nigerian church in Oakland. Because we have so many Nigerian Catholics. And before I left we had over 3,500 coming from all over the dioceses. When I accomplished my four years there my bishop visited me there and for some reason he felt that I should look for more places there for priests to come over, because we have a lot of priests. So that was why I came down to this Diocese. So I came from Oakland to Nashville. And since I came here one of the things that the Bishop did here very fast to get my papers, apply for my green card. That was a very serious incentive. That was the first thing he did. Which the other dioceses were delaying. Now I'm a permanent resident waiting for to become a citizen.

S: So it was your choice to come to Nashville?

A: Well I prayed over it. When I was to leave Oakland, but then two other dioceses there were asking me to come over. But as I prayed I said the first place that responded to my call would be where I would go. So they said they need me here and I came. And I have been so happy too. I am very comfortable with the diocese here because they are very conservative, there are a lot of conservatives in this southern part. The southern hospitality is there. I am very much at home with this diocese.

S: Can you describe an average day of work for you in this diocese?

A: When I was in St. Stephens Parish for four months it was a big parish, they were very wonderful people. I was assistant parish priest there. After four months the Bishop needed me more in Immaculate Conception, which has over 10,000 military

families there. There is a lot to be done there. Because I had my area in hospital ministry, I was predominantly occupied with hospitals, nursing homes, and the sick. So the bishop said that he has a need for someone to take over the ministry for the diocese. So now I'm managing four hospitals here. And all the hospices. So I'm always available here. I don't sit around and do nothing. It's really very tasking.

S: What about compared to an average day of work for you back in Africa?

A: Compared to Africa, you can't compare it to what we have in Africa. To be a priest in Africa is very tasking too. Very tasking more than it is here. Because the priests think that you are the only one in your parish. You take the decision to do everything. We don't have married deacons as we have here. So during time for Christmas or holidays, you have to have the compassion that everyone wants to go to confession, and there are about 5,000 people. You take about 2 weeks to begin confession every day, every afternoon, sometimes even in every day. In communion if you don't have a senior seminarian, you are done for. No one will help you. People will not go to anybody. We don't have any assistants anywhere. Like here the priests have someone to assist them, there we don't have that. If you are lucky you may have a senior seminarian to help you. You say the masses to everybody. So it was very tasking. We had the respect of the people. They respected us a lot. They (parishioners) are there to provide for us irrespective of their poverty. They valued their priests so well and cherished us.

S: Would you say when you came to the US that your responsibilities and duties were the same as an American priest? Were you treated the same as an American priest?

A: To be honest with you in some areas, I wouldn't say so much in every way. But I don't think that has happened in history in America. Some element of it is still there.

S: Can you give any kind of example?

A: Well an example of it is, because of your color you always feel it irrespective of what you are. To be precise, I have been in touch with priests where you live with and you expect to have the same kind of feeling, but the treatment or respect may not be there. Sometimes the work may be given based on what you can contribute. You may give more than him, that's what I'm saying. Well that's what I'm saying, people will always notice that you have an accent. There is no way to root out my accent, that is part of my English. When you come to America you begin to try to change those patterns to fit into the system. Somebody may not imagine and say you don't speak good English cause it doesn't sound like native American. But then you have the ability to speak up to five languages. You challenge me here, I can provide that. So the color has impact on what you do.

S: Would you say it also has an impact with people in the community too, not just priests but or parishioners?

A: Everywhere. When you come to any parish. Anywhere. You get the good people and you get the bad people. There are some people see you being black and they are turned off, no matter what you do they will always have a problem. But they don't make any effort to help you or train you. For you to come to the level of understanding them. And one of the challenges, maybe this is one of the things you have to talk about or have to ask, the challenges you have as a priest from Africa working here are the cultural barriers, the language barriers, the mentality is completely different. But if I remember what my Bishop told me, "when you go out on mission, don't go to change them but change what they have." You have come to help, so use what they have. We normally say when you are in Rome behave as a Roman. Which is very prudent, that

you're coming from a different country. You don't impose your whole cultural stuff to inject into the system. You have to learn from them as well as give what you have.

S: Are you content working here?

A: Sure, I am. I love the bishop here, I love the diocese.

S: What is your opinion on the Catholic church's stance regarding issues such as sex, divorce, and marriage?

A: It is so disappointing, that people here are bringing faith into politics. It doesn't happen in Africa. Because it has been given to us, you have to embrace how it is. Because it has been given to us, there is no issue of sexuality in man or woman. It is not for us to change what God has made. So it's a no-go area for Africans. It's a big disappointment. Like the issue of abortion. If I was aborted as a child, how would I be here to contribute? Abortion is wrong. Marriage is always between a man and a woman. There is no compromise. And that's one of the things here you have as a challenge. People hear what they want to hear, but they always come for the truth. So in some parishes I had one time or the other preached about abortion or gay rights, and people would walk out from the church. I would be very vocal about it, but being truthful about it. And some people would walk out but others would come up to me and support me in that I preached what the church teaches.

S: You mentioned earlier about Deacons that are allowed to marry here, you don't have that in Africa?

A: Never.

S: What do you think about that?

A: It's a new thing for me. The Vatican is using what they have. But the only thing we try to prevent is if this happens, then people think well then priests can marry. It's not helping us.

S: What would you think about that if priests were allowed to marry?

A: I wouldn't approve of that.

S: What do you think about the current Pope, Benedict XVI?

A: I think he's a nice guy. Even though Americans, including the priests here, they have their reservations about him. But for me I think he's a great guy.

S: What about the possibility of an African Pope in the future?

A: It's possible. It is possible. If the world were able to eliminate the concepts of first world and second world and acknowledge human beings for who they are and what they do, I think it would be possible. I think it would happen.

S: What do you think about the negative light that has been shed on the church in the past few years regarding the sexual abuse scandals among some of the priests?

A: Everything does happen for a reason. I'm not saying priests in Africa are angels, but I never would have thought of such a thing happening there. As a leader or leaders, we ought to be teaching others. For me to imagine a priest having sex with a young boy, it's unimaginable. It's a reality here. It's a kind of cultural problem. It was a big shock and a big scandal that never should have happened, but it has made the church tighter in some ways now and grows stronger. And now we have to move on.

S: What are some of the main differences you have noticed between the Church in the US and the Church in Africa?

A: The Church is a universal church. The Catholic church is a universal church that is the same everywhere. But the pattern of worship is different. Remember I told you what the bishop said, when you go to any country or mission don't go with the intention of changing them. The way things are done here (U.S.) is good but totally

different from that of Africa and Nigeria. The Nigerians are so relaxed about their faith. They're not in a hurry. Church is just number one for them and any other thing is second. On Sundays they don't work. No matter how much you are gonna pay them, they respect that (not working on Sundays). And when they go to Mass, the Mass will last for 2 or 3 hours and there will be constant clapping and dancing. You know, to lift up their spirits, that is what it is for you to work and motivate them, to build the faith. Unlike here in America, time is money. Before many of them (Americans) have gone to church they have already done the readings and know what it is about for the day. They (Americans) only want to fulfill their obligation and look at the time. They are very time conscious, especially with the mass. This doesn't mean they don't have their faith, they have their other commitments that they want. Some others do nothing more than come to Church for one hour and then go home and watch football. So you have to be very sensitive to different countries and their cultural differences. So that's what it is.

S: So would you say that the Church plays the same or different role in the lives of an American parishioner versus one from Nigeria?

A: How do you mean?

S: I guess the motivation for people to go to church in the US and Nigeria. In the U.S. it seems that people go more out of a duty or obligation from what you're saying whereas in Nigeria it seems more for different reasons.

A: I'm not saying that Americans don't have the faith, they do, but the time factor and the commitments as well as the environment and the system here are different. I mean you listen to some of them they tell you the truth that they have to pay their bills and this and that, but in Nigeria they don't have all these bills to pay, and light or no light it doesn't bother them. But for here, to get that, you have to work and work and work.

S: There are numerous social problems that are not present or less intense in America as opposed to Africa such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and corruption. Do you feel that the Church is taking an active role in addressing these issues in Africa?

A: Yeah, the Church does. For example, my country you have some of those bishops who are very vocal about the corruption, such as the former bishop of Lagos State. Then I knew him as one of the best, he was very open. The President of the Nigerian Bishops comes and gives orders to the dioceses to pray against the corruption and create awareness. But those that do are not in the government administration, because they do what they want to do. It doesn't bother them, no matter how much you preach. The church is a very strong tool to work on the government. If something is going wrong, and the bishops go around spreading awareness throughout the dioceses, before you know it they are there putting pressure on the government. So they work very hard to help the nation.

S: So that seems like that makes your life and responsibilities much different as a priest in Africa as opposed to a priest here in the US. What are some of these differences you notice there as opposed to in the US?

A: Yeah, you have great responsibility in Africa. Some of us have come into the priesthood because of the urge to make a change, especially here in America. America is seen as the greatest country in the world. You've got so many things that you don't have in Africa, like being taken care of. The system is so planned. For example your health. The diocese insures you have your healthcare connected to a healthcare provider. If you are sick, you go get treatment. But in Africa it's not that way. You work and work and work and sometimes the money is not there for you. People are poor,

not that they don't have the goodwill to give. Sometimes priests die simply because of negligence.

S: Next question is why do you think there are so many people going into seminary in Africa and not nearly as many going into seminary in the U.S.?

A: If I look back to what Africa is, especially Nigeria my country, church is the number one thing for them. They have great respect for the church. If you place the president here and you place a bishop or a priest here, the greater respect would go to the priest, not the president. The way we (priests) are treated in Africa is so motivational. You have caretakers and everything. People truly want to see you as a priest there. You can wear casual clothing here in the U.S., but in Africa we don't and we can't go to bars or restaurants or any places where you should not. The parish makes it an obligation to provide everything you need as a priest to be comfortable. If they place you in a parish, the bishop has it that before he pronounces it a parish that parish must have built a rectory for the priest. They will also buy a car and furnish the place for the priest. Even if you come from a poor family, you will probably have a better place to live than them. But once they provide all these things for you, you must be ready for challenges and for big work. You are not just meant to relax, you have to serve the need of the people. I don't see any priest dying of hunger. Poor people will even donate goods and rice and food to the priest because they really take care of them. If you are elderly they will provide you with a driver to drive you. With cooks and houseboys, we don't abuse them. They don't insult us. If any priest comes short of his priestly life, people will call you or tell you to your face what you are doing. They will send you to the bishop. They will prefer to teach you and let you know that what you did is wrong. So in these cases you always have respect. I think that's one of the things that is motivating young people to go in to the seminary in Africa. I think in my case for vocation what motivated me was the family background that I had, the way my parents brought us up, I never believed that I would be a priest. But here I am, twenty years being happy. If there is anything that I value in my life it is my priesthood. And I will die a Catholic priest.

And in the case of America here, I have been here for years now. From what I have seen, what is the motivation? You are the young man. What is it that we motivate you to join? Looking at the scandal that has come up here, how people feel about that. So the way so many people here are taking the priesthood to be makes it not so encouraging for young men. And so that's why you see people leaving the Catholic church. Seeing these things I don't blame them, but I pray for God to make things right.

S: Speaking of the level of respect that the priests have in Africa, do you think that there is an appropriate representation of cardinals in the Church today?

AA: I don't know much about that. In Nigeria we had a couple of them. We ought to have more than we have now, because Africa now has the upper hand in the Catholic Church. They have everything you need, the number of priests and the dioceses.

S: And you said before that you were trained as a missionary, correct?

AA: I volunteered

S: So would you still consider yourself a missionary today?

AA: Absolutely, I am a missionary. If I'm not I shouldn't be here. Since 2000 I have been out of my diocese and have volunteered to help other dioceses. I am very much at home with this diocese now and will soon be doing my doctorate, either at Vanderbilt or one of the Universities here. Because all this time you do what the diocese wants you to do and then you keep aside your own interests. But I have negotiated with the

Bishop here now, its up to me to combine all the responsibility I have as a priest with what I want to do for education.

S: Now will the diocese help you with the tuition?

AA: Well, I don't think so. It's just you.

S: Do you plan to return to Africa?

AA: Well, I'm praying over it. Because of the love I have for the Bishop here as a friend and mentor I might stay here. And every year we have from 15-18 priests in my diocese. A lot of us are here now, we have almost 30 or 40 something of us outside the diocese now in the States. So if you go back what are you gonna do? So I'm praying for it and will let God answer.

S: What do you like most about your job as a priest?

AA: Serving the needs of the people. I thought the ultimate thing before was to sit in the parish and listen to people. But discovering the new area I'm working in now, hospital ministries, it is an area that has been neglected by so many priests. It's so disappointing that some priests won't go to take care of the sick. But it's so precious for me to be with many of these people who are close to dying and being with their loved ones, it means so much to me. I have learned a lot about the call to be a priest. It's not just about being a pastor, but having faith. It has enriched my wisdom to help people in this way. So that alone is one of the joys of being a priest. And in parishes, I'm a very social personality. I mix a lot with people. And I am proud that I am able to touch people and help them with their faith.

S: That's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

AA: I want to thank you and congratulate you for the choice you have made, of all the areas you want to think about in writing, you think of Africa and the Catholic Church in Africa. Your research will help the American Church here to think that if you collect this information, they can adopt some changes and import them here. Remember the point I made when we were in the seminary, Father Bede will tell you, that there is no half-seminarian. You have to give your best all the time. So there is nothing you can give me now that I value more than my priesthood. So here I see how they are luring people to join the priesthood and providing everything for them. Some of the seminarians should be motivated just because of the shortage. I think that your research will be a good thing for the Church. So keep it up.

S: Thank you very much Father.

AA: Thank you my brother. God bless you.

Interview 3

Date: 18 April 2011

Location: Our Lady of Fatima. Alcoa, TN

S: First question is what is your name?

B: My name is Bede Aboh.

S: How old are you?

B: I don't even know. Well I was born in 1962 on the 27th of May.

S: And where were you born?

B: I was born in Nigeria, in ****Oneshu****

S: Is that in the south?

B: Yeah, it's in the south. It's the commercial city in the south.

S: How long have you been in the US?

B: I came to the US in 1999, end of 99' to 2000.

S: And how long have you been in this specific parish?

B: This is my third year now as the pastor at Our Lady of Fatima.

S: What language is your native tongue?

B: Igbo, I'm Igbo. I speak Igbo.

S: And your parents, do they also speak Igbo?

B: Yeah my parents speak Igbo. They are deceased now.

S: Can you tell me a bit about your family background. Were you brought up in a religious family? Did you have brothers and sisters?

B: I come from a pretty large family. My father was the only son, the only male child of his parents. And then my mother came from a polygamous family. The father of my mother had about two or three wives. And my mother was one of the most beloved in the family that she came from, so the father allowed her to go to school to be educated. She went to school as a child and then ended up as a teacher. And then my father was also very educated. My father also worked a lot for the priests, for the Irish priests. They were Irish missionaries. He did things like being a teacher in the schools (which were manned by the Irish priests that were missionaries) and then went to a teachers training college, also manned by Irish priests. And then eventually he went to the University, graduated in Economics. Then came to the United States and did his Masters degree in Education. Went to Canada, did his Post-Masters, he was going for a Doctorate and by that time he already had a family. So it was not easy for him, so somewhere along the way he came back. Then I have many siblings, I have three brothers and five sisters. And ever since I became conscious of my family, I realized that I came from a very religious family. Whereby every day we had to pray in the morning before we went to school, every night we had to pray the rosary before we went to bed. And then in most cases we went to mass in the morning, and then we come back home and get ready to go to school. So that was the type of family I came from. Everything about religion in my family is non-negotiable. You just had to do it no matter how it was. If we got into the car to go on a journey into the country, we had to do the rosary while we were in the car. So I think that the religious atmosphere of my family was actually the beginning of my vocation to the priesthood.

S: Where were you educated?

B: Yes I was educated in Nigeria. You know we have the British system of education. I went to kindergarten, which was interrupted by the Civil War in 1967-1970. At that

time my father was in politics, he was a congressman and many of them were being sought to be executed so we had to escape to the country. So we lived in the country for three years. And then when the war was over we had to go back to the city again. And then I continued my Primary School, finished my Primary School and then I went into the Seminary at the age of 12. And then I finished my Junior Seminary and then I taught in the seminary for one year. I taught the junior ones, then I was teaching Biology, Economics, Geography, manning the office for the Rector, being the Rector's chauffeur, I had to do everything. And then after that I was sent to the senior Seminary where I studied for four years, studying Philosophy. After four years I graduated with a degree in Philosophy and I was sent for Theology, which I also spent four years. Then I graduated in Theology after four years, then I was ordained a priest. Then I worked in Nigeria for about 5-6 years being in the parish as an assistant for two years, then they invited me to work at the Seminary from where I graduated to work as a Financial Administrator. And then I was supposed to be there for three years, but I was there for two years and then I was sent to an Institute for Ecumenical Education where I was supposed to teach for one year Philosophy of Religion. But within 6 months of that one year the bishop invited me, telling me that there was an opening for a scholarship abroad in Rome and wondered if I would apply. So then I applied and got the scholarship, so I left Nigeria for Italy. In Rome I did my Masters and PhD in Philosophy.

S: Your education before that in Nigeria?

B: First degree in Philosophy and then in Theology

S: And how old were you when you finished the junior seminary?

B: I finished when I was 18. Then I went to the senior seminary and I spent another 8 years in the senior seminary, 4 years philosophy and 4 years theology. By the time I came out I was 26 years old. I was ordained at 26.

S: And the language of instruction?

B: English, everything was in English because we were a British colony.

S: Why did you choose to become a priest?

B: First of all, even though it was intertwined in what I answered but there were also other reasons. First of all my family background, my family was very religious. But it wasn't just because my family was religious. I think that when every young boy finishes the primary school, they look forward to getting into the secondary school. So I really took an interest to get into the secondary school and I passed the entrance to get in. But then there was my senior, our parish priest, and twice a week he would come to celebrate the mass with the nuns. So it made it easier for us to go to the mass since the parish was so close, only 3 miles away. So with that relationship with the nuns and my senior parish priest, I would help out sometimes with the mass. And so from that he took interest in me and one day he asked me if I would go to the seminary. I didn't know what the seminary was about. I said, "what is it". "Oh it's where you go to learn and be a priest". I said "no i wouldn't". But he said "you have all the qualities, you are a good boy, you know all the students." So eventually he gave me a form to go to the seminary and told me to give it to my mother and my parents. So I gave it to my mother and she asked me if I wanted to go to the seminary, but I said I don't know. I'm looking forward to going to the secondary school. I'm so excited because my friends are also going to go there. But then one day in the afternoon my parents called me and I came and my parents said if I want to go to seminary that I should apply. And I could hear in my mother's voice that she would like me to do this. And for me I love my

mother and I would do anything for her, so I said yes I will! So I applied and on the day of the exams they took me to the cathedral and I took the exams. There I saw many young bright boys, who I was told were seminarians. So I was impressed by them and how they looked and behave and I took the exams. The results came and I found out I passed the exams. But I still had to take another exam in the seminary to weed out more people so they have enough accommodations, cause they wanted only the best students for seminary. So that morning my dad brought me to the seminary, there were English tests, math, science; they even had us play soccer cause they wanted to know that we were physically fit and everything! So after that the results came back in the evening and I found out I passed. And so I became even more excited when it was like survival of the fittest. So that was part of it. So with my family background, with the help of my mother, with the help of God, through my pastor, all of this made it possible for me to get into the seminary.

S: And how old were you?

B: 12

S: So it sounds like its fairly competitive then.

B: It is. Very very. It's the best. There is no mediocrity there. And the more you stay the more difficult you find it is. Because every day becomes more competitive and if you fail anything it would be tough to finish.

S: So did you get a scholarship to study there?

B: It used to be more costly than what you pay in the state schools. It was more costly, but our parents had to do that. You know in Nigeria there is nothing like a scholarship, everything is paid for by your parents or by yourself.

S: Can you tell me a little more about your ecclesiastical career before you came to the US.

B: When I finished seminary in 1988 I was 26 years old. And then after that I was sent to a parish as an associate. It was one of those areas. I was already well prepared for it, because when you get into the senior seminary every year you are sent to a parish for 7 weeks to live with the priest. And many times when you come to those parishes the priest doesn't want you to live with him because he will think that you are crushing his comfort. So they will send you to places where they normally go once a month or something like that. And you have to live with a family. So it was tough. I remember on one occasion my mother was looking for me, because every place I stayed she would come visit me. And on this occasion I was moving from one place to the other and there was a car that was coming behind and this was a very bushy area, so the group that was escorting me to the other village, which was about 5 miles, so we had to walk all that way. So we stepped aside so the car can have its space to pass and then I looked and saw it was my mother's car. And my mother was jumping out of the car and said "where are you going! Why are you in such a place? Is this what it takes"? And I said I was happy and I had no problem, for me it was adventurous. I think it was the grace of God that sort of conquered all of those difficulties for you so that you see more joy in what you are doing that you are giving meaning to the lives of other people. So, this was a little bit of preparation for us as seminarians because you do this for 8 years before you become a priest. So when you become a priest I was sent in a rural parish like that too, where I was for 2 years. In such a place I used to do my laundry in the stream, fetched water for the house. It was not the best but it was what was available, and I did find joy in doing thing like that. These were things that were very different from the way I grew up. Looking at my family and who we were, sort of an above

average family. A comfortable family. Then with this seminary it was exposure for me to learn other things that I never knew before.

S: And was this before you went to Italy?

B: Yes, and when I became a priest I did a lot of this too. And then, after 2 years the rector of the seminary drove to that parish to visit his family members, and he said "you know Bede, I think I need you in the seminary to come and help me to govern and take care of the seminary." You know this is one of the biggest seminaries we have in Africa, Biggard Memorial Seminary. It's also where I went to seminary. So he told me that he had told the bishop about it and that if I accepted all I had to do was sign this letter so that he knows that I've accepted it. And then within three months I was in this seminary in a big city. I was supposed to do that work for 3 years, but it ended after 2 years because of some politics there between the bishop and others there. And I told the bishop there that I don't wish to mix myself up with these politics, I'm a little priest, I want to get out. So he helped me and he put me in a school of Ecumenical Education. So I was teaching Philosophy of Religion there. So that is where I was when the message came from the bishop which if I applied and got it I would be going to Rome. So I got the scholarship and in 1993 I left for Rome.

S: How long were you in Rome?

B: I was in Rome for 4 years. I did my Masters in Philosophy and my PhD in Philosophy. And I finished in 1997.

S: And then after that?

B: After that I went back to Nigeria for some months. During my period when I was in Rome, my mother died, so my life changed again. So with the death of my mother, because my life was sort of built around my mother, it became difficult for me. When I went back home it was not home anymore. There was a parish in Germany that I used to go to work during the summer and this parish wanted me to go and work for them. So that was an opportunity. When I was so disenchanted with everything and almost going through depression I needed to get out. So I told the bishop about going back to Germany and I went back to Germany. And I was in that parish for 2 years. And after 2 years I told the bishop that I was going through a little bit of crisis of faith, with my philosophy, with the understanding of the death of my mother, with my world turning around. I thought I needed to do some courses that would reinforce my faith. I needed to do a little bit more of theology to balance my philosophy. So I had saved some money while I was in Germany and I applied for a Masters in Systematic Theology, because I had a friend here in the United States, and then I got admission at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. So I got the admission and I came to the US. That is how I came here. I began my studies in Pittsburgh; I was there for only one semester. There was a little bit of ill feeling from the foreign priests and some of the priests from the diocese of Pittsburgh, so I decided to leave. After the first semester I left for Cleveland at John Carroll University. So that was where I finished my Masters. But then it was also providential because I was introduced to something I didn't know before, Clinical Pastoral Education in the hospital whereby you deal with sick and dying people. And that was good for me because I was still dealing with the death of my mother, to understand what is life and death all about. How do terminally ill people look at God? So it was very providential for me while I was going to school. I was also going to the hospital while I was going to school. It was tedious but I struggled through it and it was very good for me. So I did that program for one year. I was working with patients on dialysis and the Oncology Department so that was good to help me cause my

mother died of cancer. Cause one of the things I struggled with was suffering, I hated suffering. And sometimes I wondered how can a good God allow people to suffer, especially when I look at my mother and how religious she was and how good she was, and that she died at the age of 52. It sort of dampened my spirit. So these were the things I had to deal with. So that is what brought me to Theology and the Pastoral Education. So when I finished these things in Cleveland, I thought that I probably need to work with the hospital of a nursing home for a while. And so that is how I came down to Tennessee, because I knew a congregation of brothers when I was in Germany, there work is to bury the dead and so they have nursing homes and things like that. I saw in the journal that we get that there was an opening for these brothers and that they needed a priest to be the chaplain of their facility. So I did apply and then I got the opening and so I came down to Tennessee. And that's how I came to Tennessee. I lived in Signal Mountain, I worked for them for 4 years. During that time I'm sure I buried not less than 150 or 200 people. After that I think I needed a change. So there was a bishop who was in this diocese, and when I met him there was a chemistry that was very wonderful and he was a very good bishop. So I told him that I would like to work for him. So that began my movement from the hospital to the parish. After 4 years in 2005 I started working for the parish.

S: And was that already here in Alcoa?

B: No, first of all. The first place I began was as an assistant at St John Newman in Knoxville. I was there for 2 years. After that I was moved to Madisonville as an assistant. But then I was a pastor in Copper Hill. So between Copper Hill and Madisonville it was about an hour drive, so I was there 3 days and here 3 days. One day off. And then I was there for almost 3 years, and after that I was placed here.

S: Can you describe an average day of work for you here in the US and then in Nigeria. Any differences?

B: You know in Africa I want people to know that a priest is a very important person. As important as a governor of a state, whatever he says is law. That kind of a thing. You are very prominent there. But over here in America a priest is an insignificant person, especially with the abuse cases, after the abuse cases where the priests abused children. You know the dignity of the priest got diminished sort of. But in Nigeria a priest is everything. When I mean that priest is everything, what it means is that you influence the lives of the people whichever way you want them to be influenced. If you are in a town or a village, you are a reference point. Everybody knows you. You cannot come to any place without being recognized. Nothing happens without you being part of it. But when you come to America it's a different thing. And that's why many times we find out that priests would like to come here on vacation but they wouldn't like to live here. Priests from my area, they would like to come on vacation, but tell them to come and live here and they wouldn't like to live here. Because it is a discipline here that is very difficult. And then again over there in my country the people are very good to the priest. I remember when I was a priest, there were very rich people who would tell me, "whenever you need another car, let me know." "Whenever you want your tires to be changed, just come here and pick up 4 tires." Things like that, you know. And because of their generosity, they love God and they love the priest. If you visit somebody, it's like God coming to somebody. They are very appreciative of that. For me, I think part of it is because over here (US) we are much industrialized, over there people are still very simple and very trusting. So that's the big difference. But then you know with time, you start to realize that we have very good and wonderful people here

in the United States in the different parishes. Those who are ready to sacrifice, those who are ready to do anything for the priest. But at the same time you have to tread cautiously because you just met them, you never knew them before, not as if you would treat someone at home. You have to be very cautious and very careful. And then with the red flags of the abuse cases you really have to be careful how you handle young people and elderly people, vulnerable people. But at home that type of cautiousness is not there. You are just yourself, people understand one another. But here it's a type of re-orientation, you have to begin to learn a new culture to make sure that you are very careful about whatever you do to cross your t's and dot your i's so that you're sure. And then the work of the priest both in Africa and here are almost the same thing but then you have to put them in their rightful perspective. Another thing that connects them again is that you don't have any time of your own in African and in the US. For instance, if I'm here and get a sick call I have to go to it, and I have to write my homilies. And it takes me a while to write the homilies and go slow, because the English concepts are not well refined in my head because of other languages so I have to do this for about 3 months to get used to what I'm doing and the way the people are speaking. So it was difficult for me, it wasn't easy. And then, the other thing that is a little bit off is that the first time that you meet someone they say Oh you have an accent. So it makes them see you as different and you feel different like an outsider. So when somebody says that as the first thing, you feel first of all unaccepted, you feel sort of beaten, defeated. Because what I tell myself is that everybody has an accent, it depends who is in the majority and who is in the minority. So that was part of what I started to feel whenever I spoke, that I had an accent. And then with time the accent became something also good because some young people would say that you have an accent and your accent is so nice, I like how you speak, say that word again. So from being something that makes me feel bad, I began to feel happy about it. And then I came down to the South and then I began to hear the Southern drawl, you know they would say a word forever, not only the drawl but also in their behavior, cause you would tell somebody to do this thing today and you come one week or month later and it's still not done, they want to take their time and do it, but I want it now. I have to disagree with a lot of people with regards to procrastinating and telling me they will do things and then never do it. I remember one of the first people like this here, I had to tell him that it's either you do what I want or I can't work with you and you have to quit. And I was happy for it because I want things to be done. You know the language barrier is there. The only way we try to overcome it is that when you are in a parish for a while people begin to understand you and begin to tune their ears. But they will tell you, that now you are speaking better now and that you have learned our accent. But it's not learning the accent; they are also adjusting to understand me while I'm adjusting to speak to be understood. And then we try to speak slowly so that we can be understood.

S: Interesting. You talked about some of the language barriers. Have you encountered any problems here due to your skin color or nationality?

B: I haven't encountered it openly. It might be something subliminal or discreet, but only after the fact that you have realized it. But openly no. Even when I was in Copper Hill, one of the reasons the bishop did not want me to live there was because he heard that the previous priest who was their told him that they were racist, and because of my skin color it would not be good to stay there. But I think that my best life in America has been in Copper Hill. Those people are wonderful. I still most of my friends there,

they call me every time. It's a place you can visit somebody without calling them, you can just come. And they accept you. So sometimes people see you as different when you appear, but after you finish a mass of a homily people will say wow I've never heard such a homily. So you win them by love. So that's the way it is. But openly nobody has ever.

S: Would you say you're content working here?

B: Oh great! I'm happy.

S: And what would you say is the best part of your job? What do you like most about working as a priest?

B: Celebrating mass. The Eucharist. It's the core of anything I do. Celebrating mass. The fact is, that as a human being, you can call God down, for me is the greatest. It gives me a true joy. So that if I can do mass 3 or 4 times a day I would do it with the same attention and same devotion. Nothing changes.

S: What is your opinion on the Catholic Church's stance on issues such as sex, divorce, and marriage?

B: I say this with all my heart, that the abuse of anything does not destroy the use. Many times you find out that people want the church not to emphasize marriage since there are so many divorces now. You can imagine a society without the normal way of coming together of a man and a woman, that would be horrible. So that because there are so many divorces does not make sacramental marriage irrelevant, what it means is that we need more training for those people. Many of those people getting married think that what they are doing is right. Think about all of this and how much more should you prepare for a lifelong thing such as marriage, you train more in school for your job. Nobody prepares for that. In the church you tell them that you have to do it for 6 months and they get angry. But this is what they want to do for all of their lives, and they can't even have 6 months to prepare for it. And then, about sexuality. We have to put things in their rightful perspective. Like I said, people think of sex as like, oh I'm thirsty I drink water. No, it has consequences. That's the problem. Am I ready to take those consequences? So if I'm ready to take those consequences then I should embrace it and take it. But if I'm not ready to take the consequences of my actions, then I better not do them.

S: The next question I wanted to ask was what do you think about the current Pope, Benedict XVI?

B: I think the most important thing we have to learn from this Pope is that you don't judge a book by its cover, because before he became Pope he used to be in charge of the congregation for doctrine and faith, and many people called him a lot of things, some good and some bad, called him the Rottweiler of the church and things like that. But we see that he is a very very intelligent Pope and not only intelligent but also a spiritual Pope that is not afraid to say he is sorry about anything. He didn't come with that high handedness. He has a pastoral spirit and tries as much as possible to win people to God. And because of his intellectual capacity, he is able to press certain buttons so as to open a dialogue with a lot of people, which he does intentionally especially with the Muslims and the Jews. We see so many bridges that he is building, even with the Eastern Church. So I think he is a man who is trying to match theory, doctrine, and practice in a way that is exceptional. And for me I think he is wonderful.

S: What do you think about the possibility of a future African Pope?

B: I'm not a skeptic, or an optimist, or a pessimist. I think I'm a moderate realist. In a sense then it would be good, if it doesn't happen then that would be good. Because I

don't like us to think about having a Pope as a political thing, it's not a political thing. If that is what God wants, then we give it a chance. We allow this to happen, not what we want or our political desires. If it's not yet time then that's ok. One day it will be time. That's the way I look at it.

S: We were talking earlier about the Church in the media, especially regarding the abuse scandals. Can you comment a bit more on this and what do you think about all of this negative media that has been shed towards the Catholic Church. Is this in a way tainting the Church?

B: You know for me, in Latin we say *Corruptio Optima Pessima*, The corruption of the highest is the worst. And the corruption of the best is the worst. You know the Catholic Church is one institution that has stood for almost 2,000 years plus. And so it has become an icon and people make reference to it and use it as a measure, and also the Catholic Church has such a government that no other country, empire, person, or institution has that. And so it becomes both a sign of contradiction, a sign of judgment and a sign of appraisal. So when we look at what has happened with regard to the secular views, you know it's a very sad story, a sad aspect of the church. It is a very painful aspect because one of the things that is an abomination for us is to abuse a child. When we hear that male children are abused by priests, that is painful and contrary to nature also. So I feel sad that the Church had to be associated with such a thing. But because we also let the press have a field day on us and talk in a derogatory way on the Church, if we didn't do those things the press wouldn't have pounced on us to tear us apart. But on the other hand what I'm talking about also is sometimes they try to use the occasion to tear the Church apart. But like I said, the abuse of something does not destroy the use of it. As such a thing happens it's a black spot in the church, but at the same time it's a growing experience. I think the church is still relevant even with all the abuses and scandals. Notwithstanding it is still relevant.

S: What differences do you see in the US and in Nigeria as far as working at the Church is concerned?

B: Like I said, when we look at the church in Nigeria, we can understand that the church there is a young church, 170 years, not more than 200 years old. What it means is that many aspects of it are still trying to take root. And it's not yet as perfect as it should be or as strong as it should be. For instance I remember when I was a priest in Nigeria there was nothing like a salary paid to a priest or a stipend. And then when I look back today, I go to the internet and see what has been. Now I can see all the names of the priests from my diocese and all things. And then now you can hear from the priests how much they receive every month as their stipend. Before when I was there you had to depend on the generosity of the people. If you were in a rural parish, you were done for. Whatever you get there that is how you survive. If you were in a rich parish you were blessed. So today things are changing. Over here in America I also see some differences. For instance when I was up in the North, I could see how the priests are treated up the north, like some priests are paid according to their years of ordination, so the longer you have been a priest the more you receive. And when I came down South here everything is on the same level no matter who you are. So, it's good to see all of these dynamics. Because what it tells us is that the Church is continuously reforming itself. The church is dynamic, is changing, gets what is fresh and builds on it. And then when I look at the Church in Africa, I see a church that is very young and vibrant. When I look at the church in America, it's a church that would have been young if they did their homework. What do I mean? It would have been

younger than it is if we took into consideration, evangelizing the African Americans right from the start. Some of them are very surprised that you have black people as Catholics or as priests. I remember the first shock I got when I was living in Cleveland, Ohio, this nurse came to me and said "what Church do you belong to?" I said "I am a Catholic priest." She said, "Catholic? What are you doing there? Can black people be Catholics?" That was what she asked me. She couldn't believe it. So many people look at an elitist church that doesn't come down to their level. That was something that I feel, if we had evangelized them it would be different. So living down here in the Bible Belt is a whole different experience, than what operates in the North. So constantly here you are defending your faith, constantly here in the South they are asking you if the Catholic Church is a Christian Church. Because they don't believe we are Christians, they believe we are Crusaders but not Christians. While in Nigeria to be a Catholic it is something of privilege and honor, down here you still have to fight to defend your faith and let people know what the Catholic Church is. We (Catholic Church) are about 2-3% of the population here in Tennessee so you can understand how here we are in the minority, but over in Nigeria we are the majority.

S: My next question is what differences do you see between parishioners in the US and in Nigeria?

B: For me, from the perspective of looking at the common humanity of each and every person, you have similarities and differences. The similarities you find are that you have a lot of good people who come to church to worship God, who are ready to sacrifice and be sacrificed, who challenge the priests to be a better person by their spirituality. Because I tell the people that they challenge me every day, and that when I come to mass I see all of them here and it tells me that we are doing something right and there is something that we have to respect every day. So it helps to enhance my faith. And in the same way at home, we also have all these people who are very dedicated to God and to the Church, and they enhance our faith too. I think part of what the difference is sometimes you find people here in America who, maybe because they are educated, they begin to challenge certain things. They begin to be more, Cafeteria Catholics...

S: Cafeteria Catholics?

B: I call them Cafeteria Catholics because they pick and choose. They like one teaching of the church but not another, they like one commandment but not another. Just like how you go to a supermarket and you pick what you want, what you don't you trade it with something else. I think over here we have more vocal Cafeteria Catholics than we have at home. At home we might have them but they are not vocal. And then also, when I think about the parishes here and what we have at home, I also find that over here things work more smoothly because money has to do with a lot of things. At home, we struggle. For instance, we have a chapel of adoration. I remember before I came here that the Blessed Sacrament is always on the table, and if there is no one in that chapel you just use a veil and cover the Blessed Sacrament. So after a while I was at unease with that behavior, I wanted the blessed sacrament to be in a permanent place so that all you do if you come you open the door and the light will shine if you are going close, so that we don't go so near to cover it. So I called the people and said this thing can be done, we need about 4 or 5 thousand to build something. Within a week, I got that money. At home, people would be ready to do it but they don't have the means, or the money. So here not only are they willing but they also have the means to do it. But what I tell myself is that where the money is lacking at home, faith supplies the people in so many ways. One thing I've also discovered here is that people withhold

money in order to punish the priests, because I think they give to priests which they like. I tell them that you give to God; you don't give to the priests. And then another big difference is, in Nigeria every member of a parish is registered. If somebody needs any services from the parish, they have to look at the list and see how much that person is contributing to the church. Over here we have some people who live downtown and come to mass, because they say they don't like that priest downtown so they have to come here, and they receive all of the benefits. You can't tell them you can't come here, but in Nigeria you can tell them that because they know they can't jump around to parishes without permission from their parish priest. Even if you are going somewhere else, you have to get a letter from your parish priest saying that you have given money.

S: Would you say that the Church plays a different role in the lives of an average American as opposed to an average Nigerian?

B: Of course, yes.

S: What are some of those differences?

B: The differences, the people in Nigeria see the Church as the beginning and the end, and the in between. Over here it is only the beginning and the end, but no in between. You have to be recognized and show yourself. Over here you can just register, even if you don't come and you die, we see your name on the register we will bury you. We can't begin to ask questions.

S: Another thing I've heard is that US parishioners are always in a hurry when it comes to mass.

B: Of course you are very correct. That one is a perennial thing. Because sometimes I get mad about certain things, and one of the things I get mad about is, I will be giving a homily and after mass somebody comes and complains that the homily was 20 minutes and should be only 10 minutes. I wonder where you read that. When I go to University I sit at a lecture for an hour or longer, so how can that be only 10 minutes. So they come up with these ideas just to run away. They feel that the mass has to be a quick service, so they can fulfill their conscience that they have done a good thing but not take too long and not do anything. And over in Nigeria, I once started to end a homily after 15 minutes, and everyone shouted "No No!" "Continue". So people over there are yearning for the word. Over here you are wasting their time. And afterwards what do they do? They go to drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, and go out talking. So it's like why are you here? Do you really know what you are doing? I tell people I should be the one that is happy, because if people don't stay long or come I can go back home and sleep or watch television or things like that.

S: Another thing that is a big difference between the US and Africa is the number of social problems present in Africa that either aren't present or much less intense here in the US. Things such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, corruption.

B: Yeah that's correct. That's part of what I was saying that when the financial capacity is not there, faith supplies. You find out that those people who are poor have more faith than those who are rich and have the money. So many times you find out that in Africa the priest might be the only resource the people have for their social needs or their problems. I remember when I worked in the parish as an associate I used to taxi people to the hospital, people who were expectant mothers or those who were sick, because there are no cars around and the hospital was 5 miles away. So these are also the different things that you don't do over here. Here you have the social services and everything is taken care of. Another thing is, I think poverty is a whole lot of problems over there in Africa. You know as a priest you have to fight hard for the social needs of

the people and you also have to teach them about their rights. So you are like everything over there. You are doing everything. You are the government, you are the one to tell them how to vote, who to vote for. Of course here you can't do that. So you are the political person, the informed person, who tells them the parties that are beneficial to the church and the teachings of the church.

S: I guess you are having elections right now in Nigeria. Is the Catholic Church involved in that somehow?

B: Of course. I have my friend, Father Martin, he is in charge of the Justice and Peace Commission in his diocese. And when he was here he was so much in a hurry to go back so that he could organize the different fronts of the party that he wants to present to them. So I think the priests are very actively involved politically, more so than they are involved here.

S: Interesting. I was also reading some statistics about the attendance rates in the US and in Africa. They have been rising quite a bit in the last century in Africa but falling in the US. Do you have any opinions why that may be?

B: Well, like I said, Africa is a growing continent. I think you have more young people over there than you have here. And then the other thing about it is that the population is growing in terms of the Catholic Church because they are also seeing the influence and the effect of the Church in Africa. Because remember, people like my parents were able to go to school because of the missionaries who came and began to build schools and hospitals. And so the Church is still showing those influences at home. In my former diocese we have about 6 hospitals manned by the nuns, and we get a lot of help from Europe, from Austria and Germany, medical equipment and things like that. So when the Church is visible in helping the people in their needs, it's natural that they will propel towards that organization that is helping them and become part of it. And then again, we have private schools that are manned by the church. I remember one of my friend priests who studied in Ohio. He has come back to a diocese and is now a principal of the biggest secondary school in my diocese. So you see that in such a school, students are more educated and disciplined, because they make them to produce. And so when such things happen it affects the society, it is competitive to get into such schools. And when this happens it attracts membership to the church. And then, there are so many villages without pipes and water, and the church goes, just like me how I'm a missionary, and decide they need portable water. They get people and drill holes and create plumbing and tell them this was done by the Catholic Church. It helps to attract people to the Church. They know that these people are thinking about us, they love us, they are doing things for us, they want to see you do things for them, not just the faith, but to match the faith with the action. So these things are very important for my people in Africa.

S: Another interesting thing I find about Nigeria is the balance of Muslims in the North and the Christians in the South, making them nearly equally proportional to one another.

B: Yes, that has dealt with ever since Nigeria was put together by the British rule, and formed the big protectorate of the North and the South. So you find out because of the Atlantic Ocean and the River Niger, that we are fortunate to have the missionaries come through the Atlantic Ocean to Christianize the Southern part. If they had not come, the Jihad of the 19th century that began in North Africa would have crushed the South. But fortunately before it began the missionaries were already around, building

up the southern part to become Christians. So that by the time that the Jihad was coming down, its influence was not very much on the South.

S: Is there any active dialogue between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria? Or more tension?

B: Of course there is a lot of tension. You know that every year there is always a war or some mayhem between the Christians and the Muslims. There is always lots of killings between both the Muslims and the Christians. There is the Christian Association of Nigeria, called CAN. Which they are using to get a dialogue with the Muslims, so that whenever there is a crisis they meet with the Muslims and talk about it. And many Bishops are in support of this and belong to this in Nigeria.

S: I was reading an interesting article about Liberia and the Civil War there. It seems like it took the country to actually go through a war for the Christians and the Muslims to actually come together and stop this.

B: Exactly. You know and even the Civil War in Nigeria, even though it began among the military people, but it eventually fizzled down to the religious waters so to speak, between the Muslim North and the Christian South.

S: Do you feel that there is an appropriate representation of African Cardinals in the Church today?

B: If you look at it in terms of the demography and in terms of politics you will say that we don't have enough of them as Cardinals. But if you look at it from the aspect of the will of God, then I would say I don't care whether it's two or three. My business is to save as much souls as possible and save my own soul. If being a cardinal would help save more souls in Nigeria, then I would go for it. If it's not going to help them, if it's only going to be a fan-fare and to show off then I don't think it's necessary. But if it would help to enhance the face of God among the people then I think that would be fine.

S: Do you plan to return to Africa?

B: Yes, I go to Nigeria every two years to see my people. And I think about it from time to time and I ask myself if I decide to return to Africa how would it be. And I say it will be fine because I still believe that the big difference between Africa and here is that in Africa people still appreciate your humanity, irrespective of whether you are wealthy or not. Over here you can only survive if you are wealthy. If you don't have money you are nobody. But in Africa once you don't have money, if you have family you are still worth something. So that is what attracts me every day to Africa and I pray every day that we don't lose that aspect of us.

S: That's actually all I have. Is there anything else you would like to say before we finish?

B: For me I'm happy that you came. I don't know, I talk too much but whatever. I hope everything that I've said will be very helpful for you in doing what you are doing. And like I said, one of the things that still impress me is the barriers that Christianity has broken and most importantly that Christ has broken. I always look at it this way. There is a book written by Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, in that book he was looking at man in the state of nature; without religion, without Christianity, without anything. And he saw the situation as *Homo Homini Lupus*, man is a wolf to man. In a sense that it's the survival of the fittest. If I cannot survive, I galvanize other people to help me survive and destroy the other person. But Christianity came and Jesus Christ and began to destroy all these walls of division and fear and intimidation. So that now, if I want to go to Atlanta, I can call a Parishioner who is not my brother or sister, and

say I am tired and need a ride, that person will come and take me there. Why is that person doing that? Because of Jesus Christ and because of love. This is very important and many times people will wonder what Christianity has done for humanity. Look at me. All the way from Nigeria, you don't even know where I am from. But I stand here and I talk to you, you are wealthy, many of you are more intelligent as myself, many of you have travelled more than myself, but you sit there and listen to me, an idiot like me you listen to me, just because of Jesus Christ. That's a miracle. And that's what I see every day. So that's the way I look at the faith and I thank God that he came in Jesus Christ to make us one in love. That for me is the most important thing that Christianity has done, that it tries to make us one. So that you hear that when somebody died in China you no longer think that Chinese are stupid people, or somebody died in Africa. But you know Father Bede, and will call me, and hope something bad didn't happen in my place. That's the unity and union and connectedness for the fact that Christianity has done these things. So we are now getting away from that limited sympathy, I call it limited sympathy, where I only sympathize if it's my brother or my sister. But now we are expanding and through that in the whole world we are connected. And that's why when something happens in China we are concerned.

S: Thank you very much Father Bede.

B: Thank you.

Interview 4

Date: 30 April 2011

Location: St. Stephen Catholic Church. Chattanooga, TN

S: I want to start out and ask what is your full name?

A: My full name is Father Augustin Idra.

S: When were you born?

A: I was born on August 16, 1966.

S: And where were you born?

A: I was born on the border to Uganda in Sudan, when my parents were running away from the war in Sudan.

S: So your parents were from the Sudan?

A: Yes, originally from the Sudan.

S: And how long have you been in the US?

A: This actually is my 7th year in the US now.

S: And in this parish?

A: No, I was first assigned to St Jude parish in Chattanooga. I was there for about a year and a half and then I got transferred to All Saints in Knoxville. At All Saints I almost finished 4 years and then I got moved to Notre Dame High School in Chattanooga. I am the Chaplain at Notre Dame High School but I live here at St. Stephens as a priest in residence. And help out sometimes on the weekends there.

S: What language were your parents' mother tongues?

A: My mother tongue is Madi. And both of my parents spoke Madi as well.

S: Do you mind telling me a bit more about your family background?

A: My parents were farmers; they were poor people so they relied heavily on the garden work. They cultivated food and that's how they fed us and educated us. We were 5 children also with my parents. Three boys and two girls. The rest are married and I'm the only priest in the family. I'm the last born, the youngest.

S: Were you raised in a Christian family?

A: Exactly, my parents actually got converted in their youth to Christianity and we were raised as Christians all through my family.

S: Can you tell me a bit about your education. Were you educated in Sudan or Uganda?

A: Yes, I went partly to school from Sudan and partly from Uganda because I was raised kind of partly from Uganda and partly from the Sudan. So I went school in both countries. And for my seminary I went first to Nairobi in Kenya.

S: And what was the language of instruction during your schooling?

A: Yes, it was Madi both in Sudan and Uganda because we have the same tribe living in both countries. And we border each other. And then in Nairobi I was educated in English. And we learned everything in English of course in the seminary.

S: When were you ordained?

A: I was ordained in 1997. In Uganda, in sort of like a camp where we have refugees from my country living around that area. But then we had also some other friends of mine who were also there. So then I was assigned to the northern part of Uganda and was there for almost 6 years.

S: That was after you were ordained in 1997?

A: Yeah, after 97'. And then from there I was transferred directly to Knoxville here.

S: Can you tell me why you chose to become a priest?

A: It's a good question. You know it's a calling to become a priest. But how I got my motivation was one day I jumped to these Italian priests, you know we were evangelized by the Comboni Missionaries from Italy. So they were missionaries who came to our place and evangelized to us. And I saw them wearing their traditional clothing and I just got attracted to that. And one time after mass on Sunday I went to this priest and told him I wanted to be just like him, I was an altar boy. I told him I wanted to be just like him and he said ok. He told my mom to nurture this vocation because it was the right thing for me and fit me. But my desire was just through this and seeing the priests wear their cassocks all the time.

S: And how old would you say you were then?

A: I was about 7 or 8 years of age. And then from there I developed the interest. I went to the priesthood when I was 16 years of age.

S: Can you tell me a bit about your ecclesiastical career after you were ordained in Africa?

A: When I was ordained I was sent to northern Uganda as I told you earlier. And then after that I was an associate in that parish. And I hardly stayed for 2 months and the Bishop made me a chaplain there for a college in Uganda. So I was working in the parish and in the college as a chaplain. So that went on for about 2 more years and then I became the pastor there in that church. And then I worked as a pastor for almost 4 years. And while I was working as a pastor I was also working as assistant to the vocation director in the diocese. And also in the Pastoral Formation program in the diocese. I also helped in organizing the first Synod of the diocese. So those are some of the things that I did there, but it was a good experience.

S: And what language were you preaching in?

A: Ok, the indigenous people of that place were called the Alur in northern Uganda in the diocese of Nabbi. The people speak the Alur language, so I had to learn their language and preach in their own language. But then they also had English mass in the mornings. Even Sundays we would have an English mass. And also when I was working as a chaplain in the college we did everything in English because people come from all over. It was mixed. But Alur language and English.

S: It's interesting, you said you were born in Uganda but your parents were Sudanese. Do you consider yourself Ugandan or Sudanese?

A: Actually I consider myself as Sudanese, cause that's where I come originally from. Although my passport is Uganda, because I was born in Uganda.

S: And you said you were assigned to Knoxville. Can you tell me if it was your choice to come to the US or how that process came to be that you moved here?

A: That's a good question. You know I am a missionary. Maybe I didn't tell you, but I'm a religious missionary priest. And as a religious missionary priest I've taken the three vows. There are the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. So coming to the US falls under the vow of obedience. I got two mails, one from the former bishop here of Louisville and then one from a Superior in Uganda. Then I got these two mails telling me I've been transferred from that parish where I was working to Knoxville. And then the letter from the bishop here reads that you are assigned to Knoxville, and all this. So I said ok, what is going on here and I called our general in Nairobi. He told me that I had already been transferred so I needed to prepare myself and get ready and move. Because I was expected to be in Knoxville in December of 2003. So I told the people that I was moving, and then in January of 2004 was when I came because the visa process took a bit longer and I couldn't make it by December. I did not choose but

just because I have to obey my superiors since I've already made my vow to God that I have to obey whatever my superior tells me so that's how it worked.

S: So whose ultimate decision is it to send you to the US? Is it the diocese in the US or Africa? How is this decision made?

A: What happened was that a couple of years ago before that superior sent me that letter of transfer to the states, he met first with the bishop of Knoxville. And the bishop, I think, requested for a priest to be sent to Knoxville. So the superior came over here and met with the bishop in Knoxville, that was many years ago before I was sent here. And then they made a contract that he will allow his priest to come here and serve in this diocese for a certain period of time. So it was under that kind of umbrella that the superior went and picked Father William, who is in Athens, and myself. And he sent both of us here in the Diocese of Knoxville. So it was the agreement between the Diocese of Knoxville and my own diocese that got us here.

S: Do you know why they chose you? Were there any kind of qualifications that you had met or something?

A: That I'm not sure, since I'm not in that decision making process. But I just happened to be lucky if I may say so, that maybe the superior picked Father William and I for here. Just like there are many of us that are working in many states throughout the US. But I cannot answer exactly why they chose me.

S: You said you had to get a visa. Did you have any difficulties getting the visa before coming here?

A: Not at all. Because when I went to the embassy in Uganda I had the letter from the superior and the letter from my bishop here, and then my documents which I presented. So I didn't have any difficulty in getting a visa. I got it the same day I applied for it.

S: And now do you still hold a visa or are you a citizen?

A: No, I'm on a green card now. I'm holding residency. Usually a visa is given for about 5 years, and then after 5 years you are expected to get at least a green card.

S: Describe an average day of work for you here in the US and one back in Africa.

A: Well, I must say that here in the US it is structured more than in Africa. I must say here I've got more hours of work than when I was in Africa. Here I leave at 7 in the morning to be in the school and then I stay until 3:30. Sometimes we have meetings after 3:30, the normal hour when school gets out. But then sometimes it can go more than that and sometimes you leave around 4. Then sometimes you have other priestly commitments like sick calls to go to. Whereas in Africa you are the one planning your own work schedule, so you are working according to your own plan, at your own pace and all that. But it's not very structured like it is here.

S: When you first came to the US, did you feel that your responsibilities and duties were the same as a priest from America?

A: Not immediately, you know when we first came here they let us get used to first to the culture and the people here. So they let us be free to observe and follow at first. I was fortunate to have worked with Father Bob, a priest in this diocese, and he is just a wonderful man to live and work with. So he allowed me to watch him do things and sometimes we would go together for sick calls and meetings and funerals and this and that. So he was kind of introducing me to how things were being done here. So because of that I was able to watch all that he was doing. So when they asked me to be fully involved, I felt very well prepared.

S: Another interesting thing about Tennessee is the thick accents many people have. Did you encounter difficulties in language, either understanding people or being understood by people here?

A: No actually me understanding them was a bit easier than them understanding me. You know with all of my accent being from Africa, that has been a problem to so many people. Especially with the elderly people, they aren't always able to process what I say so easily. Because I go so fast. Sometimes when I give the homily they don't get me cause I go so fast, but when I slow down they are able to understand me better. But I didn't have any problem understanding them here. Actually we are lucky because we had lots of different seminary professors from different countries during our training in Nairobi. So we had people from India, Britain, America, Germany, all over. We were kind of used to adjusting to different accents, so when I came here it was so easy for me to understand people than they understanding me. So up to now I am still battling with that. And they are still having difficulties understanding me, but many people share with me that they can understand me much better now than when I first got here.

S: Have you ever encountered any problems due to either your nationality or skin color here in the US?

A: Not really, apart from the language issue. Although some people might have expressed that, but I can't recall having any difficulty like that in my life. People have been so generous and kind to me and I am always having a good time.

S: Would you say you're content working here?

A: Absolutely, I'm so happy. And working with the youth, the young people, it's so amazing working with them. I love them and enjoy my work.

S: What is your opinion on the Catholic Church's stance on some controversial issues such as sex, divorce, and marriage?

A: I would like for sure to say that the Catholic Church is a champion of all of these truths that you have explained. And for us to sit back and let things roll by would be a big mistake because we are called to tell the truth and teach that truth with charity. And I think if we continue to explain and teach the truth with our own faith, it will make the world a better place. So I think it's our duty to catechize and let the community know the evil that can be brought in by these things you just mentioned. So I think we should be assertive and be able to proclaim the truth.

S: What do you think about the current Pope, Benedict XVI?

A: I mean he is just an amazing Pope. He came right after a giant Pope, John Paul II, who will be beatified tomorrow. He is just a very wonderful Pope. Of course he had a lot of challenges right from the beginning of his pontificate, but I think he is still holding on to it. It's an inspiration and a model to me. And that's how the Church is supposed to be. Pope Benedict is just hitting the nail on the head. And I think he is just doing fantastic. He is just doing great.

S: Over the past few years there has been a lot of negative publicity about the Catholic Church specifically with the priests and the alleged molestations. Can you comment on this and how this has affected the Church.

A: You know it's true. When the scandals came up strongly around 2002, it does really affect the Church tremendously because we lost so many people. People who thought the priest could be there refuge decided just to leave the church and that affected us. It is also an embarrassment for us to say that we are in that kind of situation. But on the other hand it has made the Church very strong. It has made the priests to be united together and in a very supportive group, even more so than before. And I think priests

are still trying to do their best to do what they've been called for. So all of this has made them stronger.

S: Can you tell me what differences you see in the Church in the US and in Africa?

A: First of all the Catholic Church is one. Except I know that there are different languages. I must say that the Church in Africa is kind of more lively and more vibrant than the church in the states. The church in the states is solemn, and kind of slower music. Whereas in Africa people sing the songs in their own languages and their own African way, with the African drums and the shakers. Everyone is dancing in the church. This is not the case here in the States, but otherwise it's just the same celebration. To me these are the differences where in Africa it's a joyful celebration and in the US it's reverent.

S: What about any differences between parishioners in the US and parishioners in Africa?

A: There's not much difference, except here in the States parishioners do change parishes a lot. They move from one parish to another for whatever reason. But in Africa they are kind of stationed in one parish and it will always remain their parish. Of course most people in Africa walk back and forth to church, so they can't easily change even if they want to cause they don't have cars.

S: Several priests I have talked to told me that one of the biggest differences they noticed was that Americans are always in a hurry.

A: Yeah that's part of it for sure. Mass in Africa takes much longer. That's there day so they spend a lot of time there. But here if you give a long homily they will leave you alone in the church.

S: Would you say that the Church plays the same role in the life of an African as it does in the life of an American?

A: Yes, it does because the Church takes care of its people. If you are a member of the Church you ought to be given real attention that you deserve. In Africa we have what you call small Christian communities. In these small Christian communities, they are divided into ten households which form one community. And this community must have their own leader. The communities are then linked to the parish. So if there is anything that the community needs, the leader will come directly to the parish priest and he will make sure that they are taken care of. But over here we don't have these small communities; the people are connected to their parish.

S: What about the average life and role of a priest working in the US versus in Africa?

A: You are asking the payment and all that?

S: Sure, yes. That and also responsibility wise.

A: The responsibility of a priest in Africa depends on whatever you've been given to do. Like if you are the parish priest then you shoulder the big responsibility, both here and also in Africa. But then when I was in Africa, let me give my own example. We used to share the responsibility with the other three priests I was working with cause I was the parish priest and also being given a lot of work in the diocese. So I could share my duties with the rest of the priests. Over here if you are the parish priest, you shoulder the big responsibility. But if you plan well also with the associate you can always share. And then of course for the payment, in Africa we are not paid. It's only when I came here I was given a stipend. When I was working in Africa I did not have this.

S: Are you able to save a bit while you're here?

A: Yeah absolutely. And also, as you know I have taken the vow of poverty. So half of my stipend goes to my order and then half is given to me for maintenance for my car and all this.

S: You talked a bit before about how you're a missionary. When a person thinks of a missionary, often they picture a European or Western missionary coming to Africa to convert people to Christianity. How would you say the role of a missionary is such as yourself in the US?

A: A missionary means one who has been sent. I consider myself sent because of being here now. And also my order has been founded for that specific mission. We are missionaries by nature. We are to go out and proclaim the good news, to evangelize to the community. So under that context that is how I find myself as a missionary. But of course it is very interesting in the past as you've mentioned, missionaries came to us from this part of the world. They came to evangelize us in Africa. But now it is the opposite. Your people came to Africa and they were investing something, which I guess they didn't know one day it would be the other way around. And I guess this is what is happening now, that you now see the black missionaries from Africa coming to work in the States. I guess that is what is happening right now.

S: There are obviously numerous social problems in Africa that aren't as widespread or even not so existent in the US, things such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, corruption in the government. Do you feel that the Church is taking an active role in addressing these issues in Africa?

A: The Church is trying so much to address these issues but they are still a long way from being over. These issues continue to live so long as people are living as well. And the Church will have to continuously address them as the time goes on. It's true we have a lot of issues of poverty, and this is so because most of our leaders are kind of greedy and they are not really doing their best as leaders and working for the good of the people. Most of them are doing their own thing. If they tried their best from the beginning of Independence it would be different. So you find things are still lacking. So the Church is trying to educate people on all of these issues. But still as I said, so long as people are living most of these problems will continue to occur. But it's much better than before. Around the 80's when HIV was rampant in Africa it was much worse. But because of the persistence of the church in educating the people. Up till now I must say the level has gone down because of the goodness of the Church being so vocal and so prophetic.

S: So that must have made your working life a bit different in Africa because of these issues.

A: Well yeah absolutely. It makes life so difficult because you are losing your own people. People who could be the future leaders in the Church are dying. And those who want to help cannot help because they are poor. But the priests are trying their best together with the other religious leaders.

S: There are statistics that show church attendance rates are falling in the US but at the same time rising quite considerably in Africa. And also the number of seminarians in Africa is quite high while in the US the rates are dropping. Do you have any idea or opinion as to why this may be happening?

A: They preach vocation in Africa a lot. There are lots of religious orders, schools, and missionaries present there. Different diocese come to grade schools there and talk about the different vocations in the church and religious life. So because of that you see this big number of seminarians and young women going into the convent. I attribute

that because of the constant vocation information we have going on in Africa. And that is making a huge difference of having so many vocations and really trying to recruit. Even here I can give you an example, the present bishop of Knoxville started in his first 3 years as a bishop here to talk more about vocations, and he's getting a lot of young men going to the seminary now. So I think we are having almost 5 joining the seminary this coming fall. And this is because he is always talking about that. So everything again goes back to the vocation and mission. So if you have a very strong group like the bishop has here, you will always get people. And regarding the church attendance, I must say it is becoming better here because you see more young people coming to Church here. Of course we cannot see that fully here in the South where we are a minority, there is a minority of Catholics here. But you go up North and the number is bigger for sure. For me, according to the numbers here I think it is appropriate.

S: Do you think there is an appropriate representation of African Cardinals?

A: I don't know a lot about the Cardinals in Africa. But there are more today now in East Africa than there were in the past. But I think it is becoming much better.

S: What do you think about the future of an African Pope?

A: I don't know, you never know, that depends on the power of the Holy Spirit. We can't tell exactly whether Africa will have a Pope or not. But you never know.

S: Do you plan to return to Africa?

A: I am a religious missionary as I said. If the spirit tells me that it needs me for some other work in Africa I would say yes. If it says to continue working here again I would say yes.

S: What do you like most about your job?

A: I enjoy my ministry so much as a whole. As a priest I enjoy my ministry, I enjoy celebrating each of the sacraments, I enjoy interacting with the youth, interacting with the old people, and all this. Every bit of it I'm just enjoying, especially the celebration of the sacraments.

S: Well that's all I have. Is there anything else you would like to say?

A: Well I am so grateful that you are able to pick me and come and chat with me and see how my life is. I am enjoying my life and this is my 14th year in the priesthood. There are some challenges, but those challenges have helped me to grow every day in my priesthood so it's amazing.

S: It was my pleasure. Thank you Father Augustin.

A: Thank you. Thank you so much. God bless.

Interview 5

Date: 14 April 2011

Location: St. Patrick Catholic Church. Morristown, TN

S: What is your name?

J: Joseph Hammond

S: Where were you born?

J: In Ghana

S: How old are you?

J: I'm 63.

S: How long have you lived in the US?

J: About 13 years.

S: And how long have you been at this specific parish?

J: Here in Morristown about 7 years.

S: What language did you grow up speaking?

J: Ghana was a British colony so we spoke English at school there. And then at home I grew up speaking Ga.

S: And what were your parents' native languages?

J: Yeah, they both spoke Ga.

S: How big of a family do you come from?

J: I had two siblings, there were three of us.

S: Did you study in Ghana for your schooling?

J: Yes, in Ghana. I studied for the priesthood in England though.

S: Did you study in English or Ga when you were in Ghana?

J: In English, it was a British colony so the schools were in English.

S: When were you ordained?

J: In 1989.

S: Why did you choose to become a priest?

J: Well God calls everybody. So I don't know how to answer this question because I was attracted to the priesthood. I saw the priests how they behaved and dressed. But it's not my own choice. We don't choose priesthood; it is God calls you to the vocation.

S: And when did you realize that God had called you to do this?

J: Maybe when I saw the first priest. He attracted me and from then on.

S: And how old were you then?

J: I was 8 or 9.

S: Can you tell me a bit about your ecclesiastical career prior to moving to the US?

J: I was in Venezuela for 7 years. I am not a diocesan priest, I am a religious priest. I didn't work in Ghana after I was ordained.

S: Did you choose to go to Venezuela and the US or were you sent?

J: They ask you if you want to go. You can say yes or no, it is up to me to decide. You are not forced to do things. Free will.

S: The process of coming to the US. Was it difficult as far as migration and customs and to get a visa?

J: Well I don't think it was so difficult because I applied for the visa and went to the interview and then I was given the visa. So I don't think it was so difficult.

S: What's an average day of work like for you here in Morristown?

J: Well we have mass in the morning at 8:30 and then in the afternoon sometimes. People come to see you. Obviously that's all.

S: And are there any differences between your work life here in the US and in Venezuela?

J: They are different.

S: How so?

J: Well Venezuela was in the parish and the mass was in Spanish. I would have to travel around to different congregations there too.

S: Would you say that your responsibilities and duties here are the same as an American priest would have?

J: Once you are in the parish you have to think about the parish. So whether I am African or not it doesn't make any difference, I have to take care of the parish that I am assigned to.

S: Since you have been in the US have you encountered any difficulties with the language, either being understood by others or understanding others yourself?

J: Well sometimes there are things that are different. In England the English is different there, so for that sometimes people say they don't understand me.

S: Since you've been living here have you ever encountered any problems or difficulties due to your nationality or skin color?

J: No.

S: Are you content working here?

J: Yes, otherwise I would run away.

S: What is your opinion on the Catholic Church's stance on issues such as sex, marriage, and divorce?

J: In the Catholic Church marriage is between a man and a woman. So if you bring an idea that is contrary to Christ and to scripture then I think that will be a problem. And then divorce, the Catholic Church does not approve divorce. Separation yes. That will have to go through the Canonical process also. Because divorce I think destroys everybody. It destroys the family and the people in it.

S: What do you think about the current Pope, Benedict XVI?

J: Benedict is a good man. Once you get to know and understand him, you see that he is different all together. And he served under other Popes so he has good experience and lot of it. He is a good man.

S: Do you think there is a future for an African Pope?

J: Well the Church is universal. African Pope, German Pope, it doesn't make any difference. But yes, before Benedict was elected people were talking about an African Pope so the possibility is there, you never know.

S: Over the past several years the Catholic Church has received a bit of negative publicity in the media due to molestation allegations of priests. Can you comment on this a bit?

J: First of all the priests are human beings. They make mistakes. When they make mistakes, we accept them, but there should also be forgiveness. But at the same time the sex abuse is not only in the Catholic Church. And not all the Catholic clergy abuse children. Nowadays reading the news you see even families, parents abusing their own children and also the other churches. So that they are criticizing the Church I think they have the right to do so.

S: Do you see a difference between the Church in the US and the Church in Africa?

J: Well as I said before the Church is universal. The culture and way of doing things may be different, but they are basically the same. Because here I would say people go and sit but in Africa people are dancing and singing more like their culture. That makes a difference.

S: What about a difference between the mindset of the parishioners in the US versus those in Africa?

J: Here people are always in a hurry to do things. Sometimes people leave before the final word. But in Ghana I would say people have patience, they have time for God. They are in no hurry I would say. But here people are in a hurry and after communion they leave.

S: So would you say that the church plays a different role in people's lives in the US versus in Africa?

J: Well I say people here go to mass more out of obligation. Because they think if you don't go to mass you are committing a mortal sin. So they just go to mass and that's all. That's why the people are in a rush. Where there in Africa people have time for God, they give time for religious things.

S: Would you say the average role and life of a priest in the US is the same or different than one in Africa?

J: We live in two different cultures. And I would say problems here cannot be solved like problems in Ghana. Problems in Ghana are different than the problems here. So you can't compare the two churches. I would say that would be a mistake to compare the two churches.

S: Coming from a different culture, Africa, what do you feel you can contribute or bring from your native culture that would enrich the lives of those here?

J: I would say even the presence. My presence here contributes a lot to the people to see different cultures, different people, and the different way of doing things. Sometimes the way we do things are different. Like the example I gave with people waiting till the end of mass and people going before mass. Sometimes it's shocking. People sometimes chewing gum. Different cultures and different ways of doing things.

S: There are numerous social problems in Africa that are either non-existent or less intense in the US such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, and corruption in the government. Do you feel that the Church has taken an active role addressing these issues?

J: Oh yeah the Church has taken an active role cause the Church has places where people are taking care of AIDS patients, going for consultations, help, and all type of things. Poverty is everywhere. Even here there is poverty and poor people. Sometimes people see what is outside but they don't like to see what is on the inside here. Which I think is also a mistake.

S: What do you mean by they don't comment on what's inside?

J: There are poor people here. But people don't talk about the poor people here. Cause sometimes it's only what you see from the outside. But they are neglecting that there are poor people here. Which I think sometimes is false. They should say things also about the needy here, not only to look outside and then presenting as if everything is perfect here. I don't think we live in a perfect world.

S: Do you think that makes the working life different for a priest in Africa as opposed to a priest here in the US?

J: Because of how they present things. Sometimes they present everything rosy here. Everything looks like a rose. And when I think about the reality it is difficult because it is sometimes false.

S: Church attendance rates have been falling in the US but rising in Africa. I was also reading that the largest seminary in the world is in Nigeria. Do you have any opinion or ideas why it seems that Africa is becoming more religious and the US is losing its religiosity?

J: I would say this falls also on the same cultural issues because sometimes they say that this is post-evangelization. And Africa is now an evangelizing continent where they are going and spreading their religion. But here people are overcoming their religiosity. People don't want to be religious because something is false or not right. And also you have to be careful, that in Africa religiosity is in their hearts and is part of their culture. So people coming to seminaries and also the population. Nigeria has a large population, bigger than Ghana. They have the Igbos, they are very religious in Nigeria. So they have lot of vocations. Then in Ghana in the north we are very religious, so we have more vocations also in the north. So this is happening because of this and the culture.

S: I was speaking with another priest from Africa and he was saying that a families social status is elevated in some ways when one of their family members becomes a priest. Would you say this is true in Ghana as well?

J: Elevated, well in Ghana I would say no. Because if you are working you have to contribute to your family and help your family. But now as a priest how do you help your family, that is one of the problems.

S: Or maybe how people perceive you.

J: They see you as a person. But the family, I don't know.

S: Do you feel that there is an appropriate representation of African cardinals today?

J: Well in Ghana we have only one cardinal. One died and then we have the one now. I would also go back to the population and when the evangelization started in Ghana. So gradually. Because all the bishops are Ghanaians. Before we had some foreign bishops. But now all the bishops in Ghana are Ghanaians. So the hierarchy has changed a lot.

S: You said you went to seminary in England. Did you do any studies after that?

J: No, I went to Venezuela and I didn't have time for any more studies.

S: Do you plan to return to Africa?

J: Oh yeah. I'm just working here for some time. After all I am an African, I am a Ghanaian. Sometime I have to go back to be with our people.

S: That's all I have. Anything else you'd like to say before we finish?

J: Well as I said before the Church is universal. And I think people from Ghana or parts of Africa coming to other places also helps sew the richness of the church. Also I believe now that there are vocations, there are a lot of vocations. Sometimes they don't even accept all of them, of the boys who apply to be priests. If they can help the seminaries I think that would be ok.

S: Thank you very much Father.

J: Thank you.

Interview 6

Date: 19 April 2011

Location: St. Mary Catholic Church. Athens, TN

S: I want to start out and ask what is your full name?

W: My full name is Father William Bixon Oruko

S: And when were you born?

W: 1969. April.

S: Where are you from originally?

W: I am from Kenya. Born in Kenya. Raised in Kenya. And educated in Kenya.

S: What part of Kenya are you from?

W: The western side of Kenya. I come from along the Lake Victoria.

S: What language did you grow up speaking?

W: The native language is called Luo. But once children start going to school they are taught in English and English language is the official language in my country. There is another language called Kiswahili. Kiswahili is a national language mainly for uniting different dialects and people who cannot speak English will speak Kiswahili. The third category of languages is called foreign languages. Which is like Italian, German, French. People can learn those selective languages. Otherwise we have dialects and official language is English and native language is Kiswahili.

S: And in your household when you were growing up what language did you speak?

W: I started speaking Luo, my dialect, and then my Dad was educated so he would speak English. My mom went through elementary, did not go to high school. She would speak also a little English. And my brothers and sisters and people in the village would speak English.

S: So you had a mixture of different languages.

W: Yes.

S: Were both of your parents from Kenya?

W: Yes.

S: Can you tell me a bit about your family background?

W: Yes. My dad married my mom and they were both Catholics. Then we were 7 siblings, 3 brothers and 4 sisters. My dad has since died. And then my elder brother also died and two sisters. The last born was a girl and died because of a tumor. The rest of us are still alive. My mother is in Kenya and all of my brothers and sisters.

S: When you were growing up you studied in Kenya. You studied in English?

W: Yes.

S: After you finished grade school did you go to seminary after or university?

W: After 8th grade you do the national exams set up by the government in Kenya by the minister of education. If you pass that exam then you go to high school. If you don't pass that exam you cannot go to high school. You are tested in English comprehension, literature, and grammar. Also Kiswahili, math, physics, chemistry, geography, history, religion, and agriculture and business.

S: And you took this test?

W: Yes. Actually the test in primary last for 3 consecutive days. In high school it lasts one month. Before you go to university it is a really tough thing. The exams are set and given by the Minister of Education throughout the country. This is a kind of disparity

cause you have some students in the city with lots of resources and some in the rural areas where there are no resources. And so the tests are set on the same standards.

S: And was this a public or private school?

W: I went to a Mission School, which was within the mission, so that was much better.

S: And when did you attend seminary?

W: When I finished 8th grade I went to minor seminary in Nairobi. That was 1986 and lasted for 4 years. Now when you go to minor seminary that is also like High School. You do all the government education system and subjects and you are tested like any other public schools. The only difference is that in the minor seminary you have also a spiritual formation apart from academic studies. You do extracurricular activities as part of the program.

S: And so after these 4 years are you ordained as a priest?

W: No no. After the 4 years then, because I wanted to be a missionary, you get results fast from the government after doing the national exams. Your results will qualify you to join a university. So even if you continue with your vocation you must have a grade that is equivalent with anyone joining a university or college. So after my minor seminary, then I had to apply to continue with my religious formation. So I joined the Apostles of Jesus to study Philosophy in Kenya.

S: Can you tell me what motivated you to go to seminary and become a priest?

W: It's a long story. But when I was young, we used to go to the church. And my father would pray all the time and my grandparents too. So whenever they were going to church my grandma would always pull my hand every morning to wake me up and go to church. Before you go to school, you go to church first. And then my parish was started by missionaries from Holland. They were fathers and nuns and did a lot of work in that place. They built schools and they built a church and then some chapels. They built technical schools. There are so many things the missionaries did. And during mass, we wanted to be serve mass but we were still little. And then we just wanted to be just like them. So you had to wait and grow up to have first communion and then apply to be an altar server. So you'd wait for one year. But we could not wait. We were just so anxious to be there. I think that's what started inspiring me and many boys. So I became an altar server and became a scout and then we would go to visit the sick with the priest. But also the way the priest celebrated mass was just very inspiring. So we wanted to be priests, but we were not entirely sure. And then the nuns would work with us on weekends at the missions, they would give you jobs to do in the schools. So those are the things that kind of influenced me. When I finished 8th grade, my pastor, when we were applying to join minor seminary in my class there were almost 15 boys. So the pastor took us for an interview and right after the interview he told me I had to go to the Apostles of Jesus to be a missionary. I didn't know why. I was scared, but he said no you will go. So he is the one who gave me the form to fill out. The rest of my colleagues he told them to join the diocesan seminary. And so that's how I came to join the Apostles. And as time went on there was this burning fire in me that said yes I would like to be an Apostle, but at the same time I wanted to do something else.

S: Did he give any reason why he wanted you to join the Apostles?

W: No, he didn't tell me the reason. As a matter of fact, by that time my dad's business had gone down. There was nothing.

S: What did your father do?

W: He was a businessman and also a preacher. So he had his own business. Then it fell down and he would not really pay for my fees. So the pastor decided that he would pay

my school fees and I would be a missionary. And I tried to resist that cause I wanted to go where my friends were to the diocesan seminary. But one way or another he told me to think and pray about it. So I got many invitations from the public colleges. I got invitations from the seminary of the diocese. And then I got the invitation from the Apostles of Jesus in Nairobi. So the pastor told me go and decide yourself. So I went to my mom and my mom said she would not decide for me, she would only pray for me. And I went to my dad and he told me to decide and he would support my decision. One night I was praying and wondering what I should do. The following day I compared the tuition fees for the different schools and seminaries and the Apostles of Jesus. Then I found Apostles was less, so I took that.

S: And you were there for 4 years?

W: The 4 years was high school. Then after that you do national exams and graduate. Then you apply to continue with the Apostles of Jesus. Instead of going to a University you join a religious institute with the level of a college but is focused on Philosophy and Religious Studies. So I applied and then my rector and teachers had to recommend me. So in Nairobi I met students from all different parts of the country. I did Philosophy there in Nairobi for 2 years. I graduated and after that I applied to join to be a missionary with a certain group. If you want to be a missionary in any order you have to join this certain group and here you go to learn about religious orders.

S: So how did you become ordained as a priest? I'm still a bit confused as to how and when that happened.

W: Once you finish with this missionary group you take your first vows. You take a vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience. And then you come back to Nairobi and study Theology, which is 4 years. So on the 3rd year of study you are sent to a parish to work. Then you come back for your fourth year, and I was then ordained a Deacon before my 4th year was complete. Then you finish your studies and you do bacheloreate in Rome at the University. Then you graduate. At that time I was a Deacon, but when I finished with bacheloreate then I was ordained in Nairobi.

S: Tell me a bit about your ecclesiastical career before coming to the US.

W: Once I was ordained in 1999 then my superiors assigned me to work in the northern part of Kenya. The bishop there was an Italian bishop. And the diocese is cosmopolitan; you have Muslims, Christians and other people. So I was assigned to there and then the bishop tells you where to go. But in my case it was different. The bishop didn't tell me where he wanted me to work. He told me that he wanted me to stay in his residence. So I stayed there. Later he told me that he wanted me to help him if he goes for the meetings to help and take his notes. Then they wanted to start a minor seminary for the diocese and they wanted to me help in the formation of this. But I said No, that I wasn't ready and prepared or trained to help format something like this. He said that I should think about it though and that I wouldn't be in charge though. So I was in residence there still with him and was thinking about that. That was in 2000. And then he wanted also to start a high school for boys. So there were two things to be started together, minor seminary and boys high school. And he wanted me to figure out how that can be done. I started working on all of that and then he told me I was going to be the principal of the school and a rector. And I said No, but he told me I had to do it and so it came to be. So I worked in that school and minor seminary for 4 years. Normally we are assigned to the diocese under contract for 3 years. If they want you to work then they have to renew your contract with your superiors. So the bishop had asked my superiors to renew my contract with the diocese. But

unfortunately when it was being worked out I got this letter that said I was being transferred to the USA.

S: So tell me a bit about that. How it came to be that you came to the US. Did they tell you to come here or did you want to come?

W: No. I had no idea. I never dreamt in my life that I would go abroad. Actually the USA was the least of all in my mind.

S: Did they give you any reasons why they wanted you to come here to the US?

W: Well if you are a missionary you take the vow of obedience. You are trained that you can be transferred anywhere in the world. That's what a missionary is. Missionaries your formation is very wide compared to a diocesan priest because you can be sent anywhere in the world. Your superiors can assign or transfer you anywhere they want. They can consult you, they can ask you, or they can just tell you that you are assigned to any place. You have already taken the vow of obedience and if you want you can seek dialogue with them. So I just got this letter that said I was being transferred to work in the United States. I didn't know even how to pronounce Knoxville though.

S: So you came straight to Tennessee then?

W: Yes

S: How long did the whole process take from once you got the letter of transfer to when you actually moved to Tennessee?

W: I think it took like 3 months.

S: Not long really.

W: No not long. But it was not an easy thing. It was scary. My mom, when I went to tell her she really cried. I didn't know where I was going. It was just like why, why, why? And you know I had mixed feelings. You hear a lot of things about the USA, by the media and by people. It's a good place, but you only hear negatives about the USA.

S: And this was in 2004?

W: No, it was 2003.

S: Ok, so this was right during the Iraq war.

W: Yes, the portrayal of the USA in the media was a loose cannon so to say. The worst thing though was when the sex scandal had come out. So people tell you if you go there, there is all this bad stuff.

S: So you came straight to Athens?

W: No, I came to Knoxville and I was assigned to Sacred Heart. So I worked at that cathedral for 3 years and after 3 years then I was assigned to St. Mary's Oak Ridge where I worked also for 3 years. Then in 2009 in August I was assigned here in Athens to be a pastor for the first time.

S: Describe an average day of work for you here in this parish.

W: Well you start with mass at 9 and then you are in the office till 5. There are some days which you are very busy and other days depends. I have one day off. But that does not mean that it is always free. If there is a need for an emergency call or something I have to respond. But otherwise it is good. It is relaxing and at some times very hectic.

S: Would you say that it's a much different work day here than in Kenya?

W: Well in Kenya you have too much than here. In Kenya the priests work so much that they really don't live long.

S: They don't live long?

W: Yes. They work with too much demanding work in Africa and other third world countries. There is a lot of work in Africa because priests or religious people do everything. They manage the parish, they start projects and must look for money to

start the projects. If you are assigned in a place where there is no church you have to decide how to build that church by yourself. So you have to look for money, apply to organizations abroad, applications, pastoral work, drive far away to churches on the weekends. So there is a lot in Africa compared to here.

S: Since you've been here for 7 years, would you say the duties and roles you have here would be the same as an American priest?

W: Of course there is respect. I would say that here things tend to be easier somehow. But when it comes to pastoral care Africa is best. Because here things are kind of formal. Kind of cosmetic a little bit. People go to church. It's about the time. Everything is time time time. Schedule Schedule Schedule. There is a lot of stress. I may be bias but that's my own observation. Western culture is so much stressful. It stresses you and you are very stressed. But not because of a lot of work, a lot of stress. In Africa there is no stress, you feel so relaxed. Because time is life. And life and time and celebration and happiness is more important than being ruled by guidelines or time tables. You just feel relaxed. You go to church.

S: Another question I have is if you have encountered difficulties with the language here in Tennessee?

W: Yes. Myself and Father Augustin, we are the first African missionaries to work in this diocese. For us there was no program set up by the diocese for acclimation or to get used to the language or culture here. Maybe now they do have something but I don't know. I was very well received here but a very big change. After two weeks of first being here I wanted to go home. You feel lonely even though you feel loved. Because one thing you are black. You look like an outsider. You speak and people say they can't understand you and I can't understand them either. English is our second language so pronunciation is different for us. And they want you to do it according to them, speak their accent like they speak in the south. It took a long time. You go to school or mass and some would not greet you. But the majority were good. They would ask you some funny questions like whether you take a shower at home in Africa or if you bought your shoes in Africa or in the US. The majority of people did not know where Africa is. The only thing they knew about Africa is poverty, diseases, and violence. That is just the concept of Africa. By and large though it was good.

S: You kind of answered thing question a bit already, but I wanted to ask whether you have encountered any problems here because of your nationality or skin color?

W: Not really. I can't say from my own experience here I have experienced anything like that. But there are a lot of black students and people around here so I think the people are open and excepting.

S: Are you content working here?

W: Sure. Yeah. It's a good place. It's a wonderful country. People are good. There is high expectation of a priest here. Yeah it is good. I don't expect people to be angels. So I've never felt people mistreated me in a bad way. I would have gone home if I not.

S: What would you say you like most about your job here?

W: Celebrating mass and preaching to people. Talking to people. I find a joy when you celebrate mass and you see people coming to receive holy communion. You find a joy in talking to people after mass and seeing little kids coming to hug you. They just come and hug you. So you feel good and humbled so to say.

S: Next I want to ask your opinion about the Catholic Church's stance on issues such as sex, marriage, and divorce.

W: As a matter of fact I can tell you that my experience in Tennessee, I think the sacrament of marriage is valued and people still want to protect it. And it is very strong in the mind of the people. And people want you to talk about it and speak about it from the pulpit. Having said that people are being tolerant also. They are very sensitive to people of different minds and orientation.

S: It's my understanding that deacons are allowed to get married. Is that true?

W: There are two kinds of deacons in the church. Transitional deacons, those who are going through seminary and waiting to be ordained a priest. Then you have the permanent deacons. These deacons are married before.

S: That was my question then I guess. How do you feel about permanent deacons being allowed to marry? Is that unfair?

W: Permanent deacons came as a result of the pastoral needs. Mostly in the western world because of the lack of vocation. Vocation went down completely. While from the beginning it was the West and America who was sending missionaries, priests, nuns to Africa to evangelize. But when materialism and many many things started happening with the western world and the religion was put second and values were being thrown through the window. The issue of pursuing happiness and materialism and high consumerism of things. Because of the lack of priesthood you didn't have priests to help. So it came for the help of a permanent deacon to help. They were married. They must be in a marriage of good standing. And then they were formed to help the priest. They do things like baptism, catechism, they can teach. So you have deacons who are professionals, already in their field of profession. It's very very excellent. And they do an excellent job. Now, they become deacons with permission of their wives and children. And their primary vocation is marriage. Even though they are going to be ordained, the primary focus is the marriage with their wife. If a wife dies later, once he is ordained, he's not supposed to remarry. So he can be ordained a priest if his wife dies. But they cannot be ordained a priest if they are still married.

S: What do you think about the current Pope, Benedict XVI?

W: He's very wonderful. He's very spiritual. He's very intelligent. He inspires people in a different way compared with John Paul II. He follows more or less footsteps of John Paul II. But his nature, you know he was in academia, he was a professor and a teacher. He's in to writing and educating people about the faith, but shares also his gift of writing. He is humble. I was in Rome last year and I had a chance to be in his audience. I mean you cannot believe, he is very very humble. He reaches out to all.

S: What do you think about the future of an African Pope?

W: Well, I don't know. The way the Church is it has nothing to do with Africa or what. It's in the work of the Holy Spirit. There are a few cardinals under the elect pope. So that means that anybody can be elected by the rest of the cardinals through prayers of people and the Holy Spirit. The difference is about our attitude and what was there before to distinguish people by color, race, ethnicity, or from probably watching if someone is from a developing country or not. I think when it comes to electing people, if people want to elect you they will not look at your color but what you can offer.

S: Do you think there is adequate representation of Africans among the cardinals?

W: I don't think. I don't think you can ever balance that. It depends on how big the continents are. For example Africa as far as I know, every country there is only one cardinal. Like in my country there is only one. Then there are some countries that are big, like the United States has more than 10 cardinals. But of course what they do, not

all cardinals go to the enclave for the election. I think there are 80. All of the cardinals though bring the face of the church, and the church is one and universal.

S: What is your opinion on the sexual abuse scandals in the Church and the negative light that was shed by the media?

W: Well it had a really bad picture. It was just a bad thing. So it was really bad for the church here and also the whole world.

S: What differences do you see between the Church in the US versus the Church in Africa?

W: There are many. In Africa and third world countries, even though there is a separation between the state and the church. When people here come to church they want to know how long is the mass and how long is the homily. It cannot be too long here in the US. Tell a story about a movie and they will remember that. But tell something from my culture and they don't remember it. Talk about the scripture, the sacraments, theology and you will just see them looking up as if they are bored. In Africa you can preach for a long time and even the kids will sit and pay attention, you connect with their life and what is going on there. You will see how your message is not only penetrating their minds but also the membrane of their everyday lives. So it goes to the life, that is the difference. And singing too, people sing like they are being entertained. Here in the US people are looking for a church that is like a stadium and a kind of socialization. But I would say that the church in America is very strong compared to Europe.

S: What about the average life and role of a priest in the US versus in Africa or Kenya?

W: Well, here the priests live longer. They are very well taken care of. Here they get a kind of salary. They have a car which I didn't have before. That is really good with the church in America and Europe. In Africa you have one car that is for everything. It carries the people who are sick in the village, for shopping. In Africa priests very rarely have a day off. I was talking to my pastor when I visited home, Monday is their day off. Because Monday is when they can drive to the city and go for shopping and they call it their day off. And even sometimes on these days parishioners want to meet them. So they work too much.

S: I talked to a priest from a different country in Africa, but he was saying that the social status of a priest in his country is much higher and more respected by the community. Is it the same in Kenya?

W: Yes. Yeah. Priests are very respected. Priests and bishops are very valued. And the people really take care of the priests also. Because during the Sunday the people bring their farm produce as part of collection. They come and bring everything that you would normally buy at Wal-Mart here. So it's kind of a social status thing. Now if you go to Africa, you will be surprised the way you will be respected. You will feel something which you have never felt in your country or your home. They want to learn from you and they love you. They want you to feel happy and that you are part of them. They want to make sure that you feel welcome.

S: There are obviously various social problems that are present in Africa that are either not present or less intense in the US. Things such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and corruption in the government. Do you think that the Church is taking an active role in addressing these issues in Africa?

W: From the beginning there was.. The Church in Africa moved in stages of its growth. Until they became being sent out like we are now coming to America. Before it was the Western world sending the missionaries. The first church after being evangelized was a

receiving church, a church being provided. Because the missionaries came to Africa and the colonialists and provided for them. It was a church that was like a child. So they provided in that way. They didn't help people to work for themselves. So they provided education, health care and then they would provide clothes cause of poverty and food. Well this destroyed industrialization, because the Church was being a church which receives. The second stage was now the church, which was not supposed to be receiving, it was a church that was supposed to take care of itself. Because now many missionaries were dying and some missionaries were going back out. Because they built the schools, built training colleges, educated Africa; young people. They took them to the seminary. Some of them were ordained, some of them became teachers, some of them became leaders, some of them were the ones who became presidents and again suppressed their people. Most of the past educated generation of independent Africa were educated by missionaries. By Catholics and Protestants. This Church which was supposed to be self-independent now the priests were taking over leadership, some priests became bishops. So that is how the people viewed the priests from the west as people who were very rich. Because they would do mighty things. They would build, like my pastor did wonderful things. I would have not become a priest if the West did not help. But he would go back to his people and raise money, and then have money to build and provide all these things here in Africa. The last stage of the church now is a church which is supposed to provide. That was the 3rd stage. So that means if there is a community in Africa that does not have a church, I as a priest have to figure out how to build one for them. I do not have a lot of money to build a church like here in the US though so I have to figure out where and how to get the money. Go to the internet and look for organizations and start applying, begging. So the needs of the people are overwhelming and they don't trust the government to provide clinics and education. Now when I was growing HIV/AIDS was not there. There was only malaria and some sicknesses. But when HIV came it has really killed people. Because people did not know what was HIV. Another thing which was bad during my time was what they called the World Bank and IMF. They wanted to control the population of Africa because so many people were now being educated by the university and there were no jobs. Because the jobs were what you call white collar jobs. These jobs were few. So there was a big population of highly educated students, even up till now. Every year. And these people with no jobs what were they doing? They resulted to violence and anti-social activities. So the IMF and World Bank wanted to give donations for us to do something. So they started giving condoms for AIDS, giving money for that. When they were giving condoms for third world countries, it was for the control of birth. To prevent the population increase. The the condoms that were being sent during that time, as far as I know, they were not meant for preventing HIV. They were only for preventing pregnancy. When HIV was detected later on in 1980s there was no cure. So they then said you can use condoms to prevent HIV. Now the condoms they were giving were of very poor quality because there were small pores or holes in them. And these were big enough for the HIV virus to come through. Now they have not told people about that. So young people who were sexually active thought that they will not get HIV. And that's what made HIV spread very fast. So the Church for some time refused people to use condoms. And that was the logic. Because the condoms were not there to prevent the virus. So if I'm a pastor today in a church in Africa, trust me, your parish will have funds coming to you and you depend on donors. But the pope John

Paul II addressed the social problems with Africa with what was called Ecclesia, and was a way to deal with HIV, poverty, violence, and other problems.

S: There are a lot of statistics that show that church attendance rates are rising considerably in Africa but at the same time declining in the US. Do you have an opinion why this may be?

W: Well in Africa you still have, marriage is the whole thing. Marriage is the key in Africa. People still get married and they get married to beget children. Even though we still have HIV. Another thing could be is that the living standard has improved. You can go to any village in Africa or in Kenya and you can speak English with little kids. So with education things have improved. Another thing also, the government with the help from the international communities, the churches, and the world, some services are being provided. Churches are full because people want to find the meaning of their life. People want to know how to deal with the problems they are going through. The only place they go to is the church. If they don't go to church they feel haunted. And then the concept and appreciation of community life is very strong in Africa. Communal connections and bonds. While here in the US it is not about community, it's about independence. And this is the way children are raised. Test that, you want to help somebody here and they will say "No, no I can do it" but in Africa they would say "Yes, help me".

S: You trained to be a missionary in Africa. Do you still consider yourself as a missionary?

W: Sure.

S: And do you plan to return to Africa?

W: Yeah, I will return. It's up to my superiors. Wherever they want to send me I will go.

S: That's actually all I have. Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

W: I just appreciate.. I think what I can add is that I think there is a great appreciation for the church in Africa appreciating the church in Europe and America. For bringing the word of God down there from the beginning. And educating to the extent that most of us got an education and then I trained to become a priest. Those first missionaries who went to Africa were volunteers. They took challenges, they had fear, they went to a place they knew there was not many resources, no comfort, no water, no electricity. They left their parents and families and comfort in the Western world to go to where there was nothing. Today if we come today to the US it is because of those men and women. Maybe they are now dead. And I also appreciate the Church in the United States, like here in Knoxville, for giving us the opportunity to serve here. Because now I am working here, and what I am paid I'm able to give half of it to go back to my order to train the seminarians in Kenya. And then the little I have I'm able to feed the poor children and poor people back in my home or village. Or even taking another child to school, making a difference. So that is a part which I really appreciate here.

S: Thank you very much Father William.

W: Thank you so much.

Abstract

English

The recent shift of Christianity's center from the global "north" to the global "south" in the last century continues to have numerous implications in modern society. What was once considered by many as a religion exclusive to the West is now of increasing dominance in areas such as Africa and Asia. This new geographical center of global Christianity is beginning to take on many of the characteristics of its Euro/American predecessor. One such characteristic is the implementation of missions and missionaries from the global center of Christianity to its peripheral areas. This phenomenon is referred to as "reverse-missions", since areas within Christianity's new global center (e.g. Africa and South America) are now sending missionaries to the US and Europe. This research addresses the "reverse-mission" phenomenon as well as the aforementioned shift in global Christianity's center by analyzing African Catholic priests working in US dioceses. The primary questions posed for this research deal with the motivational factors for African-born priests to join the priesthood and work in the US, and whether such cases can be considered "reverse-missions". A series of interviews with African Catholic priests living in the US in conjunction with a historical analysis of the Catholic Church provides the methodological foundation for this research. Findings reveal that the various types of missions have played an influential role in the geographic shift of Christianity throughout history. Furthermore, the roles, responsibilities, and societal influences of US priests compared to African priests are considerably different, providing both motivations and deterrents for priestly vocation in these respected regions.

Deutsch

Die erst vor kurzem stattgefunden Verschiebung des Zentrums der Christenheit vom globalen "Norden" in den globalen "Süden" im letzten Jahrhundert hat weiterhin zahlreiche Auswirkungen für die

moderne Gesellschaft. Was früher von vielen als eine exklusive Religion des Westens angesehen wurde, ist nun von zunehmender Bedeutung in Regionen wie Afrika und Asien. Dieses neue geographische Zentrum des Weltchristentums beginnt viele Charakteristiken des ehemaligen Euro/Amerikanischen Zentrums anzunehmen. Eine dieser Charakteristiken ist die Einführung von Missionen und Missionaren aus dem globalen Weltchristenzentrum in seine Peripherie. Dieses Phänomen wird als „Rückmissionierung“ bezeichnet, seit Gebiete innerhalb des neuen Zentrums des Weltchristentums (zum Beispiel Afrika und Südamerika) Missionare in die USA und Europa schicken. Diese Untersuchung setzt sich mit dem Phänomen der Rückmissionierung als auch mit der oben erwähnten Verschiebung des globalen Weltchristenzentrums auseinander indem sie die Arbeit katholischer Priester aus Afrika in den USA analysiert. Die primäre Frage dieser Untersuchung behandelt die Motivation von in Afrika geborenen Priestern Geistliche zu werden und in den USA zu arbeiten, und ob solche Fälle als „Rückmissionierung“ bezeichnet werden können. Eine Serie von Interviews mit aus Afrika stammenden Priestern, welche in den USA leben, in Verbindung mit einer historischen Analyse der katholischen Kirche bildet das methodologische Grundgerüst für diese Arbeit. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die verschiedenen Typen von Missionierung eine einflussreiche Rolle in der geographischen Verschiebung des Christentums im Laufe der Geschichte spielten. Weiters ist die Rolle, die Verantwortung und der soziale Einfluss von US-amerikanischen Priester im Vergleich zu afrikanischen Priestern deutlich unterschiedlich, wenn sowohl die Motivation als auch die Abschreckung der priesterlichen Berufung in diesen Regionen betrachtet wird.

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EDUCATION

- 2009-2011** **University of Leipzig, Germany & University of Vienna, Austria**
M.A. in Global Studies: A European Perspective
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- 2007-2008** **University of Rostock, Germany**
Guest Student in Department of Sociology
- 2003-2007** **East Tennessee State University, USA**
B.A. in Criminal Justice/Criminology (concentration in international terrorism)
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Honors: Magna Cum Laude
- 2005** **East Tennessee State University Study Abroad in Germany**
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- 1999-2003** **Karns High School, Knoxville, TN USA**
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2010-11** **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Organized Crime Unit Intern.**
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- 2010** **Research Consultant and English Editor for Professor Hartmut Elsenhans. University of Leipzig, Political Science Department**
- 2009** **International Receptionist. Norwegian Cruise Line**

INTERNSHIPS & ADVANCED TRAINING

- 2011** **“Youth Voices Against Violence: Using Media as a Tool to Promote Peace” in Bakuriani, Georgia**

2010 Scenario Process: “South Africa 2020” with Daimler AG

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English- Native Language (US Nationality)

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SKILLS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

2011	KWA Research Grant Recipient. University of Vienna
2009-2011	ERASMUS Mundus Scholarship Scholar
2009	Certified in Shipboard Firefighting, First-aid, CPR, and Maritime Survival
2007	Magna Cum Laude at East Tennessee State University
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2003-2007	Placed on Dean’s List every semester. East Tennessee State University
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-International Relations policy and debate, Criminology, Global Security and Conflict Resolution

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