

THE HISTORY OF ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, AGBOR

EARLY BEGINNING:

What is today St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor started as a Mass Centre on a plot of land purchased by the Catholic Church from the Ogbemudein Community on 10th June, 1976. The Mass Centre began on 13th February, 1983 following directives from Rt. Rev. Anthony Okonkwo Gbuji, then Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese to Rev. Fr. John Orisemele Ibude then Parish Priest of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Agbor, to effect its operation. It became known as Azu-Agbor Mass Centre on commencement and placed under the supervision of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Agbor. However, since the centre was housed in a giant hut near a cluster of bamboos, it was nick-named "UKA UKUN OTOSI".

The Centre grew gradually with Mass celebrated every Sunday by Reverend Fathers sent from St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Agbor. Towards the end of 1983, Rev. Fr. John O. Ibude left for further studies in Rome. He was succeeded by Rev. Fr. Matthew Ogboi on 10th June, 1984 who championed the formation of a church committee to facilitate the development of the centre. The first church committee comprised the following: Mr. S. A. E. Onwubuya (Chairman), Mr. Lazarus Eledu (Vice-Chairman), Mr. J. N. Ukpere (Treasurer) and Mr. A. K. Emeye (Secretary) amongst others. Rev. Fr. Ogboi's stay was very short hence, Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Dennis E. Arimokwu became the Parish Priest in the last quarter of 1984.

As the population of the Mass Centre increased, the Bishop of the Diocese made first Pastoral visit to the centre on 26th July, 1987. The visit witnessed massive conversion of people and administration of the Sacrament of Matrimony on many couples who were reluctant to marry in the Church. The Bishop used the opportunity of the visit to promise the upgrading of the Mass Centre to a Parish provided the congregation is able to build a Rectory or Rev. Fathers' House.

The congregation was visibly challenged and had to mobilize men and materials to actualize the dream of building a Fathers' House. Therefore, through communal labour mostly supervised by Bro. P. J. E. Effam, and fund raising, they set out to work. These efforts yielded dividend as the foundation of the Fathers' House was laid in early 1990 shortly after the first fund raising on 14th October, 1989. Subsequent fund-raising activities took place on 3rd August, 1991 and 19th August, 1993 and with the co-operation and commitment of the people, the Fathers' House was ready for use.

With the Fathers' House completed, the Bishop posted Rev. Fr. Michael Osemene on 14th February, 1994 to Azu-Agbor Mass Centre as the first Resident Priest. It was within this period that the first Harvest Thanksgiving was held (i.e 1994) under St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Agbor.

Rev. Fr. Jude Onyenibade succeeded Rev. Fr. Osemene in 1995 and was transferred within few months. Thus, Rev. Fr. Michael Odowu Elue (now Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese) took over from Rev. Fr. Onyenibade. The second Harvest Thanksgiving took place in the Mass Centre in 1995 under Rev. Fr. Michael O. Elue (P). On 6th February, 1996 two Priests were posted to the Azu-Agbor Mass Centre. These were late Rev. Fr. Francis Ogagbor as Priest-In-Charge and late Rev. Fr. Raphael Nweke who served as Assistant. During this period, Statutory Groups, Pious Societies and Committees were put in place to meet up the additional pre-requisites for the approval of the Mass Centre as a Parish.

CREATION OF SAINT JOSEPH'S PARISH, AGBOR

On 7th November, 1996, the then Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Okonkwo Gbuji announced at the Priests meeting, the creation of some parishes of which Saint Joseph, Azu-Agbor was among. However, even though Rev. Fr. Michael Nwokolo was posted to St. Joseph's Parish as the Priest-In-Charge, the official announcement for the creation of new parishes including St. Joseph, was made at Onicha-Olona on 8th December, 1996. Thus, the Azu-Agbor Mass Centre became a Parish on that date (i.e 8th December, 1996).

The name of the new Parish St. Joseph, was chosen by the first church committee because from the onset, the Azu-Agbor Mass Centre was placed under the supervision of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Agbor.

Since the creation of the Parish, the following priests have worked in St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor as Parish Priests: Rev. Fr. Michael Nwokolo (1996 – 1998), Rev. Fr. Michael Onwuegbuzie (September 1998 – Sept. 2000), Late Rt. Rev. Msgr. Matthew Arinze (Sept. 2000 – August, 2007), Rev. Fr. Francis Ofozor (Sept. 2007 – August, 2008), Rt. Rev. Msgr (Dr.) Michael Ifeanyinachukwu Mozia (August, 2008 – August, 2018) and the incumbent Rev. Fr. (Barr.) Stephen Chukwudumebi Chukwuma (10th Sept. 2018 till date).

The following Priests have worked as Associate Priests in St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor: Rev. Frs. Patrick Ojobu, Paulinus Iwueke, Anthony Azuwike, Peter Mobuogwu, Peter Emuanwa, Ambrose Igumbor, Emmanuel Ikeduba and Cyril Ofuonye, others are Rev. Frs. John Mordi, Jude Awunor,

Benson Irabor, Francis Okpulu, Joseph Okoli, Anthony Nwaeni, Innocent Onyeogoh and Valentine Anagwo.

It is noteworthy that in the year 2000, Very Rev. Msgr Matthew Arinze's era as Parish Priest witnessed a great milestone in the building of the St. Joseph's Church Complex. This was achieved with the able assistance of Rt. Rev. (Dr.) Emmanuel Otteh, the then Church Building Committee chaired by Hon. (Ambassador) John O. Nwagimeje, the Supervisor Mr. P.D.C Obuseh, etc and the very industrious Parishioners who labored day and night to ensure the completion of the project.

During this period also, the Chapel, Mariam grotto, Blessed Sacrament Altar inside the Church and the St. Joseph's grotto in front of the Church were all initiated and completed.

STATUTORY RATING IN THE DIOCESE

St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor, is currently a Category B Parish under the Agbor Region in Issele-Uku Diocese. The Parish has a numerical strength of over One Thousand (1,000) faithful cut across different walks of life and which exemplifies the universality of the Catholic Church.

PRIEST PRODUCED IN ST. JOSEPH'S PARISH

The Parish has produced three (3) Priests in the Issele-Uku Diocese. These Priests were ordained as follows:

1. Rev. Fr. Festus Owakwe (24th August, 2013)
2. Rev. Fr. Innocent Nwanunu (19th August, 2017)
3. Rev. Fr. Christopher Okonji (19th August, 2017)

PASTORAL LIFE AND ACTIVITIES OF ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH:

1. BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (BCC):

For a more effective running of the Parish and to facilitate the pastoral and spiritual life of the faithful in the Parish, the then Parish Priest Rt. Rev. Msgr. (Dr.) Michael I. Mozia in conjunction with the Parish Council, created the Basic Christian Community on 14th September, 2010.

Under this scheme, the Parish was divided into Ten (10) Zones each with leadership structures and defined activities. The zones cover the entire

catchment area of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor. Zonal Mass is held in each zone at least once a year.

However, to ensure effective management and productivity, the Parish Priest Rev. Fr. (Barr.) Stephen C. Chukwuma in conjunction with the Parish Council, restructured the number of zones to Six (6) and re-invigorated its leadership on 27th October, 2020.

The Basic Christian Community has helped to promote evangelization, love, unity, co-operation and understanding among the faithful. Infact, to a large extent, it has made the entire Parishioners a family of worshippers.

2. FOOD APOSTOLATE:

The Parish Food Apostolate was introduced by Rt. Rev. Msgr (Dr.) Michael I. Mozia in conjunction with the Society of St. Vincent De Paul on 6th March, 2016. It is aimed at catering for the less privileged, poor and needy in the Parish through contributions in cash and kind, from Parishioners on bi-monthly basis, in line with the teachings of the Apostles.

3. BIRTH OF NEW PARISHES FROM ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, AGBOR

New Parishes have been created from St. Joseph's Parish. These are:

- (a) St. Matthew Catholic Church, Alibuba, Agbor created on 8th Sept., 2011 under Rt. Rev. Msgr. (Dr.) Michael I. Mozia's era.
- (b) St. Stephen's Mass Centre (Catholic Church), Agbor on 6th March, 2022 under the era of Rev. Fr. (Barr.) Stephen C. Chukwuma.

4. GROTTTO OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

A beautiful grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary was erected in the Church on 22nd February, 2012 courtesy of the Obuh Family in memory of Late Hon. Ben Obuh. The grotto is located by the second entrance to the church.

5. THE NEW FATHER'S HOUSE

The parish was faced with the daunting challenge of building befitting father's house. Therefore, the foundation stone for the building of the new house was laid on 13th February, 2012 by the Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese, Most Rev. (Dr.) Michael Odogwu Elue. This was during the era

of Rt. Rev. Msgr (Dr.) Michael I. Mozia whose untiring efforts to ensure that the Priests that would take-over from him, reside in the new Father's house.

To the glory of God, the new Father's House was completed and commissioned on August, 2018 by Most Rev. Dr. Michael Odogwu Elue the Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese. The building and completion of the edifice was as a result of wide range of efforts by the Parishioners through their individual and group donations and communal labour, friends and well-wishers of the Parish and His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Michael Odogwu Elue through moral, spiritual and financial support. The Church Building Committee made unquantifiable efforts towards the realization of this project. The committee comprised the following: Engr. Jonathan Anamali (Chairman) Mr. Martins Odiase, Mrs. Adamma Aigbogun, Hon. Elvis Ebiye –Onyibe, Sir Friday Obianke, Late Ambassador Joseph Onyemaka, Mr. Paul Dibie, Engr. Emeke Utebor, Mrs. Helen Ulebor and others.

6. EXPANSION OF THE PARISH

St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor have witnessed monumental development between September, 2008 and now.

Within one year of his assumption of office as the Parish Priest of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor, Rev. Fr. (Barr.) Steve Chukwuma initiated and completed the ceiling of the entire Church Building Complex with aluminium zinc covering round the roofing thus, preventing rain water from entering into the building. The Altar rails, kneeler and lectern were completely remodeled and beautified.

The new Father's House was refurbished with Tabernacle installed by the Bishop of the Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Michael O. Elue on 11th April, 2019. Moreso, the old Fathers' House was restructure and became the Parish Office cum staff/visitors lodge.

PARISH WRAPPER/ATTIRE

St. Joseph Parish wrapper was introduced in 2019 and it became the official uniform of Parishioners used during SOLEMNITY and Parish outings like the Good Shepherd Sunday, Christ the King, Feast of St. Joseph the Worker (Patron Saint Day) and others. This has further boosted the Church as a family and justified the name St. Joseph's Family.

PARISH HALL

There arose the need for a new Parish Hall following the dilapidation of the old one. Therefore, through the contributions of Parishioners and the management initiative of the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. (Barr.) Steve C. Chukwuma, modest Parish Hall Project was embarked upon in May, 2021 and completed in August, 2021 to the relief of the Parish and Parishioners.

INTERLOCKING OF THE CHURCH COMPOUND

The Church compound which have been faced with erosion menace and the problem of parking space for vehicles and motorcycles has received attention. Hence, the Parish embarked on the interlocking of the entire church compound, a multi-million naira project which was made possible through the wisdom and doggedness of the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. (Barr.) Stephen C. Chukwuma, relentless efforts of Parishioners and the financial support from the Delta State Governor, His Excellency, Senator (Dr.) Ifeanyi Arthur Okowa. Thus, the project which kick-started in June, 2021, was completed in October, 2021.

PARISH WEBSITE / EMAIL ADDRESS

The Parish has a website / Email contact where information about the church can be sourced. The website is www.stjosephcatholicchurchagbor.org.ng, Email Address: info@stjosephcatholicchurchagbor.org.ng

PARISH DATABASE

The Parish has a Data Base which contains the names, address, and phone number of Parishioners arranged alphabetically.

GOOGLE MAP

St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor has been integrated into the world wide Google Map to enable visitors from all over the world locate and be directed to the Parish. The link is as follows: <https://goo.gl/maps/RXJ6napeKFk6bbdE8>

LOCATION

St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Agbor is located along Okwuijen Street, Boji-Boji Agbor. It has a robust history of origin, activities and development.