



Vincentian Solidarity Office

March 2016 Bulletin



Tragedy in Enugu

Scott Fina is in his twelfth year of service as the associate director of the VSO. Here he shares reflections concerning the heartbreaking loss suffered by our Nigerian Province.



Our last bulletin discussed the work of Fr. Jacob Ugwoke, C.M. and the DePaul Hope Social Center in Enugu in Nigeria. The VSO is working to raise funds for Fr. Jacob to purchase a vehicle for his center. We now sadly return to Enugu for another story that involves a vehicle. Seminarians from the Nigerian Province's philosophy house in Ikot Ekpene were in an accident on the road leading into Enugu. The seminarians were traveling in a minibus to attend a holiday gathering at the Province's theology house. A tire blew out on the minibus, causing it to rollover several times. Six seminarians died. Ten others were injured; two critically.

This horrific news tore at my heart. In 2014, the VSO co-funded the purchase of the minibus that the seminarians were riding in when they had their accident. But my connection to the story goes deeper. The first travel I conducted for the VSO was to Nigeria in 2004. During my visit I made the same journey from the philosophy house in Ikot Ekpene to the theology house in Enugu. The sights on this road were typical of what I observed in Nigeria: immense poverty and many weary people struggling to eke out a living. The road itself was in drastically poor condition with numerous, deep potholes. Equally troubling, was that every several kilometers an armed soldier stopped traffic to collect an unauthorized "toll" from vehicles. For me, the road leading into Enugu came to symbolize one of the main issues impeding the economic development of Nigeria, a nation so rich in oil and other natural resources, and yet so poor: widespread public corruption that has undermined progress on basic infrastructure.

I also recall during my visit, reading a publication generated by the philosophy students in Ikot Ekpene. It boldly addressed the extent and immorality of public corruption in their region. I was moved by the seminarians' courageous and prophetic commitment to social justice. This was no surprise, however, because I also saw how their older confreres exemplified those traits, and worked tirelessly and joyfully at their ministries to the poor, despite the overwhelming needs they faced, and the draining environment in which they lived.

The loss of the six seminarians—such young good men and great promise--stirs memories of Nigeria that have haunted me over my years at the VSO. The memories remind me of how unfair it is that I live in such a privileged society like the United States, while billions of people so struggle in other places in the world. This is not the kingdom of God that Jesus of Nazareth envisioned--nor is it a world that Vincent de Paul would tolerate.

We offer our deepest sympathy and prayers to the confreres and families of these seminarians, and hope for the full recovery of those who survived. We find this tragedy unfathomable. But seeing the example of the tireless Nigerian Vincentians, we look around us and take away only one question from this event: a question first asked of Vincent de Paul by Madame de Gondi four centuries ago. We offer it to other Vincentians who edify us by their works, and the generous people who support them--and to ourselves: **"What must be done?"**



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Motorbikes in South India

Our South Indian Province is growing rapidly in membership and works. While this is good news, it comes with challenges, one of which is providing confreres with vehicles so they can do their work. The mission parishes of the South Indian Province typically have outstations that are beyond walking distance. The people in these remote villages only receive pastoral services if confreres travel to them.



South Indian confreres with their new motorbikes

The Province requested the VSO to help it fund the purchase of motorbikes for four parishes where need for transportation was pressing: two in Andhra Pradesh, and one each in Telangana and in Kerala States. The VSO obtained private donations, which it matched with monies from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF), to finance four motorbikes. All these parishes experience monsoon rains and muddy roads, so the motorbikes, while helpful, are temporary and limited solutions. The VSO will continue working to help the Province obtain full size motor vehicles.

A Training Program in Vohipeno

We have reported previously on the Foyer de Tanjomoha, a social service organization of the Province of Madagascar that serves children and

adults with disabilities, orphans, vulnerable youth, and the ill in Vohipeno. The VSO recently assisted Tanjomoha with a new program: the *Ecole Supérieure d'Informatique et de Gestion Appliquée de Tanjomoha* (ESIGAT).



Students learning in the ESIGAT program

ESIGAT trains vulnerable youth, and youth with disabilities, in computers (IT), accounting, English and French, to make them more employable in Madagascar's modernizing economy. The VSO matched grant monies from Manos Unidas with VSF funds to help cover the start-up costs of ESIGAT.

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Our goal: To assist the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for its evangelization and service of the poor.

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