

## **CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY NIGERIA CONDUCTS ITS FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

78 members of Christian Life Community in Nigeria participated in the Fourth National Assembly, which was held at Loyola Jesuit College on 11 - 15 August, 2010. Veteran members even praised this Assembly as the best one they experienced.

Our assembly team met seven times in the last three months to make sure details and logistics were in place before we started. Tony Maurice did yeoman service when the bus from Lagos had to come a day early; he arranged for people to be available to receive them and feed them; and this had to take place expeditiously because they did not arrive until the time the generator was supposed to be turned off. Tony also handled the registrations and also helped me to facilitate the content of the program.

The opening ceremonies included an address by **Fr. George Quickley, S.J.** He spoke of the relationship between the Society of Jesus and CLC and then he announced **Fr. Kelechichukwu Egonu, S.J.** as the new Ecclesial Assistant for CLC-NIGERIA.

At the end of these ceremonies, each Region presented a symbol of itself. The Benin Region was immediately acclaimed as the best entertainers as its members, in fine Bini regalia presented a replica of the Oba's sword and shield, while they sang and danced their way to the front of the hall. (One person remarked that we should have had this on videotape.) The West Region presented a plant as a sign of its growth. The East Region presented of posture of how they are growing in different venues. The North presented a calabash of milk; this symbol was not put on display because its contents were shared among the participants. This was the first time that we had a welcome by regions; it was the most entertaining feature of the entire assembly.

Lois Campbell, whom I first met at the USA Assembly in Amherst, MA in 1974 and with whom I worked when she was the director for the Renew Program for the Scranton Diocese, is now the Secretary for the World CLC. She came to help us with the assembly, and she did a masterful job. She helped give the participants a sense that they belong not just to a local community or even to a regional or national community but, especially, to a world community. She did two of the eight presentations and assisted Tony and me in the last one of "Putting the Pieces Together." She was able to state our CLC way of proceeding in a simple and clear way so that the participants could see that CLC is not a political or a devotional organization but a vocation to a lay Way of Life. This alone made the assembly a success.

I myself presented the session on Different Types of Spirituality, emphasizing the Apostolic Spirituality which flows out of the Ignatian vision. Lois taught the Paschal Mystery Cycle, the process whereby groups come into existence, develop, sometimes fall apart, but need to be brought back to the story of their foundation. Stephen Nwaeze illustrated the Power Cycle, whereby groups can evaluate what is going on, make suggestions how it can improve, and then decide on a way forward. Tessy Edijala highlighted Three Styles of Leadership: the Authoritarian which is found in country and in our church, the Consultative which is found in tribal or village meetings, and the Facilitative in which a stable group is able to make its own decisions. Tony Maurice emphasized the Role of the Laity and how lay people need to take responsibility in the church and in the world. Finally, Lois explained the new Stages of Growth and Development which emphasizes the need for formation through the

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and the need for people to commit themselves to living the CLC Way of Life.

After each presentation, the participants prayed quietly about what struck them during the presentation. Then they met in small groups to share the fruit of their prayer. Then they came together in the large assembly to hear the highlight of each small group and, thereby, see where the entire group is going.

In addition to myself and Kelechi, three Jesuit scholastics were participating: **Patrick Etamesor**, who is the assistant chaplain here at LJC; **Babajide Arowosafe**, who will take over as the Guide for the CLC at LJC; and **Peter Ehimanre**, who guides the students at St. Francis, Idimu, and who took over 500 photographs during those days.

Seven students from St. Francis participated in the assembly and frequently gave good input during the small group sharing and in comments from the floor. But they were unable to interact with their counterparts from other schools. (This shows us that we need to place more emphasis on getting the youth to come and to have special features for them.)

Our election process is done by discernment. Candidates pray to see if they are being called to serve the national body. If so, they submit their responses to a questionnaire. On the first night, the participants read their responses; on the second night, the candidates speak their "platform" and respond to questions for greater clarification; on the third evening, the election is done by communities. There was only one candidate for each position; so the voting was by "Yes" or "No." Beatrice Ihenyen was re-elected president by 15 of the 19 voting communities; Nnanna Otu was elected vice-president unanimously; and Tessy Edijala was re-elected secretary unanimously.

Each Region was responsible for the liturgy on one of the days. We were fortunate to have celebrants who enlivened the liturgies. The Provincial kept everyone awake with his story of anger and with the singing of the Eucharistic Prayer; Archbishop John Onaiyaken affirmed the work of small communities in his Archdioceses and in the country; Kelechi Egonu preached his entire homily without the script; and I spoke on our need to grow into an adult relationship with Our Lady. The final feature was Kelechi's first official act as the new Ecclesial Assistant; he signed the Act of Consecration for seven of the participants who committed themselves to live by the General Principles of CLC.

I was very concerned that we have a dearth of leadership in CLC-NIGERIA. So, the assembly tried to train the participants to have the tools for leading a community and also to have the confidence to do this leading. I was sensing that we were not succeeding in this effort. So, I made it a point to stress this in my homily on the last morning. But when I read the Evaluations which were written by the participants at the end of the previous day, I found that many of them had gained this confidence and were eager to put the tools into practice in their local communities.

Dominic Totaro, S.J.