

HOLY CROSS CISTERCIAN MONASTERY ILLAH, DELTA STATE NIGERIA: COVID-19: A SHARING OF EXPERIENCE

Preamble: In the wisdom of the Abbot General and his council we have been asked to share with our brothers and sisters in the order our experience of the Covid-19 pandemic which globally affected all of us in our community life. on our daily life, our liturgy, work, our economy, hospitality, our relationship with the local Church, etc. our present needs and how we see prospects for the future. In other to address the above issues it may be necessary to observe that the response to the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen from three perspectives each of which has a significant impact in one way or the other to our community life. These are: Directions of the Federal Government, Directions of the Ecclesiastical Government and Our Community Response to the Pandemic.

- 1. The Response of the Federal Government of Nigeria to Covid-19 Pandemic and Its Impact to Our Community:** The Federal Government of Nigeria borrowing a leave from the global response to the pandemic reacted to Covid-19 in various ways; significant among them includes inter-state lockdown, recommendations of sanitizers, facemask, washing of hands etc. The inter-state lockdown affected our going out to buy what we need especially for our feed mill firm for our poultry farm and restricted our customers who come to buy our farm produce especially our pigs and poultry products such as eggs. It is needless to say that it also affected brothers movements especially when such movements involved going beyond the state our monastery is located and led not only to the suspension of international travels that necessitated the suspension of the General Chapter this year but also us it led us to suspend our local meetings of the Superiors of the Benedictines and Cistercians Associations of Nigeria that takes place after the octave of Easter.
- 2. The Ecclesiastical Response to the Pandemic:** Following the directions of the Holy See, the Meetings of the Federal Government of Nigeria with the Church leaders, each Diocesan Bishops adaptation to these and our community response to them; the pandemic also affected the way we celebrate the liturgy. For instance we celebrated the Holy Week and Easter this year without the people of God that usually join us in such celebrations and even afterwards we continued the celebrations of our liturgies especially the Holy Eucharist without the people of God. We also receive the Holy Eucharist in one specie and in the hand and when we admitted outsiders to join us we also give them the sacred specie in the hand instead of the tongue. We exchange the kiss of peace by humble reverence of one another through slight bowing of our heads instead of our usual shaking of hands.
- 3. The Community Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic:** Besides the effects and adaptations of our community on the directives issued by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Local Church; our community also responded to the pandemic through temporary suspension of reception of guests in our guest house which we have opened up again on August 1st and brothers are encouraged to resist or minimize their movements even within the vicinity where we are living.

On the negative these adaptations to the pandemic significantly affected our economy but positively it also significantly ensured greater solitude to us than before, reduce our unnecessary activities and calls us for greater reflection on our vocation as Cistercian Monks. Some of the transactions we made through social communications like phone -such as purchase of some of our materials for our feed mill showed us that there can be other better way of making these transactions without our physical presence. The Covid-19 pandemic also reminded us of our common humanity, common frailty and love we owe to one another. We are not yet totally out of the mess but we have stayed in it long enough to have learnt our lessons.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Ogechukwu Ibe, OCSO