

A BRIEF STORY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA, GUSAU NIGERIA, AS PRESENTED DURING THE VISIT OF SR. MARTHE ABADAHOUÉ , OP, THE WEST REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR OF DOMINICAN SISTERS AFRICA (DSA) TO SOKOTO DIOCESE BETWEEN NOVEMBER 1ST AND NOVEMBER 3RD AT THE DOMINICAN SISTERS CONVENT MABERA, SOKOTO.

The Prioress General of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Gusau Nigeria in the person of Sr. Justina Nnajofofor, OP, our own dear visitor and Sr. in St. Dominic... Sr Marthe Abadahoue , OP, the PMS Director of the Diocese ,, Sr. Sylvaline Obiezughara, OP, the House Superiors of Gusau, Mabera, Didan Dare and Birnin Kebbi Communities and all the Sisters present, it is my pleasure to stand before you today, on behalf of My Prioress General, Sr. Justina Nnajofofor, OP, the Councillors and indeed all my sisters to welcome you Sr. Marthe, OP to my Congregation, to Sokoto Diocese and particularly to Sokoto town. We have tried severally to make this visit a possibility but we have succeeded only but now. I thank God immensely because the saying goes that, it is better to be late than never, so I am glad that it has materialized at last.

I wish to give a brief rundown of who we are, where we are situated, what we do, the challenges we face and the impacts we have been able to make in the lives of the people we minister to.

Our Foundation:

The story of the founding of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Gusau Nigeria as an indigenous Congregation in Northern Nigeria goes back to 1956 when, at the invitation of Dominican Fathers in Nigeria, the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend, Kansas, United States of America, came to Gusau to be Christian Presence in the Muslim-dominated North West of Nigeria and to carry out the direly needed work of evangelization and social work in the then Sokoto Prefecture, now the Diocese of Sokoto.

Nearly twenty years after, in 1973, the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend, Kansas began the formation of Dominican Sisters of Nigeria as an independent indigenous Congregation to take over their work in the area. In 1997, this goal of establishing an indigenous Dominican Congregation was realized when, following their First General Chapter, the Nigerian leadership was constituted; thereby obtaining their autonomy from the Great Bend Dominican Sisters who are presently among the seven (7) Dominican Congregations in United States of America who merged to form Dominican Sisters of Peace, USA.; who have also been very supportive to us.

Our apostolates and communities:

Initially, the work of the Dominican Sisters- health, catechesis and women development was targeted at the rural poor, especially women, children and youths covering such areas as Gusau in present day Zamfara State , Funtua, Malumfashi, Katsina in Katsina State, Yelwa-Yauri and Zuru in Kebbi State in the early 60s, 70s and 80s. As the years went by, we increased in number and have spread to cities and other towns within and outside Nigeria.

For decades, the Dominican Sisters were the only Religious Congregation working in the very vast Diocese of Sokoto until ten (12) years ago in 2013 when the Daughters of Divine Love (DDL) Congregation came to the diocese. Later, the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Congregation (EHJ) came and followed by Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel (SSMA) months later. (However, it might interest you to know that as we speak now, the last two congregations have left the diocese due to one reason or the other that made it impossible for them to survive in this very difficult and arid ground.)

In addition to the Diocese of Sokoto where we were originally founded, our Congregation is also working in the Arch-diocese of Jos, Dioceses of Kontagora, Makurdi, Enugu and Issele –Uku. Others include the Archdiocese of Abuja –FCT. Dioceses of Awka, Gboko and Lokoja. Furthermore, we have Communities in the Northern States of Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina and Kaduna. We are also on mission to Ghana, United States of America (USA), Austria, Rome, Ivory Coast and previously in Grenada.

The most prominent aspect of our apostolates/ ministry is the engagement in Primary Evangelization, establishment and / or management of healthcare facilities, and educational and social welfare institutions.

Our demography: Currently, we have a membership of Ninety Four (94) professed Sisters, Twelve (12) Novices and Six (6) Postulants.

Challenges:

- a. **Islamic fundamentalism:** Unfortunately, this important location of the work of our Congregation has been under severe threat from the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in the North-Western states called BOKO HARAM.
- b. **Banditry:** The presence of Banditry where bandits terrorize, rape, maim, kidnap and extort money from their victims or even kill them after collecting money from their families.

- c. **Harsh economy:** The economic situation of things in Nigeria is terrible as there is high degree of inflation, gross devaluation of our currency and wanton mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds which has made life increasingly very unbearable to the common man.

In spite of the overwhelming frustrations and the present threats, we have not and are not going to abandon our apostolates because we were called and missioned for the difficult terrain of Sokoto diocese. We strongly believe that God is with us and will never abandon us even for a moment.

- d. **Poverty of parents:** Most of our apostolates are education and are situated in the rural areas. Due to the economic difficulties in Nigeria, many of our parents are not able to pay their wards school fees. Some bring in crops and food harvested from the farm to tread in for school fees which still cannot suffice.

How have our work impacted on the local communities?

- a. **Evangelization:** Through the help of the Holy Spirit, some of the locals have been converted to the Catholic fold and are doing well especially the indigenous people of Malumfashi area who constitute the backbone of the massive area of the just created diocese of Katsina, in Katsina State. We also have such group of converts in the Kwatta Area of Gusau in Zamfara State.
- b. **Christian presence:** Due the present high rate of banditry and frequent kidnapping of the people in the Northwest especially in Malumfashi and Gusau areas where we work, , many people are relocating but many are still there waxing strong in faith ; and when asked , they simply reply that the presence of the Sisters inspire them to remain and keep striving.
- c. **Education of the people:** There are a lot going on in terms of empowerment of the locals through the sponsorship of many of the children through scholarships gotten through the benevolence of some charity organizations. Through this, many of the people have acquired education, skills and knowledge to be able to fend for themselves. Not only that, through our schools where many have graduated from, they have been performing so excellently well that they have outshined their fellows wherever they are. Due to the strong and beautiful foundation laid in their lives, they have exceled in different fields of study and are a pride to the society.
- d. **Health:** Through our health apostolates, many lives have been saved and many children safely delivered.
- e. **Empowerment through acquisition of skills:** We have been able through our apostolate of social and rural development projects along Malumfashi axis in Katsina diocese and in Gusa, Sokoto diocese, to empower many people through modernized farming, use of

fertilizer, adopting and practicing good storage system and skill acquisition by which people's economic independence have been improved and sustained over time.

- f. **Our DSIC and DSA experiences:** As part of the Dominican Family and the only indigenous Dominican Congregation in the Western Region of Africa, we have been very active in participating in Dominican Sisters International Confederation (DSIC) programmes and conferences since the year 2000 and in the Dominican Sisters Africa (DSA) activities to the extent that three (3) of our past Prioress Generals namely: Sr. Francisca Igweilo, OP, Sr. Faustina Jimoh, OP and Sr. Jacinta Nwaohiri, OP have held various positions at different times and have played active parts in the growth of DSA. Recently a workshop was organized at Abuja between 18th and 19th September, 2025 by the JDPC arm of the three (3) Nigerian Dominican Congregations-Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Gusau, Nigeria (USA foundation), Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Ibadan (Italian Foundation) and Dominican Sisters of Pompei (Based in Mbaise, Owerri) under the auspices of the Justice, Peace Development Department of DSIC . The title was “ A training Workshop for Rural Women on backyard gardening to address the impact of climate change variability on food security”. This was aimed at empowering the rural dwellers on how to maximize the little spaces they have in order to grow edible plants that will help to increase their level of food security.

Attached are some of the pictures.



We are open to continuing to collaborate in pursuit of our salvation through the living of synodality among us as members of the Dominican Family sharing the same Dominican vision and Spirit.

Once again, we are happy to welcome you to Sokoto diocese. Enjoy your stay dear Sister.

Report Presented by:

Sr. Comfort

Sr. Mary-comfort Okoro, OP

Congregational DSA Representative (2nd November, 2025)