The Collaborative Ministry Of Priests and the Religious in the Local Church.

By

Christian O. Ele, PhD
General Studies Division
Enugu State University of Science and Technology,
Agbani, Enugu, Nigeria.
Email: boomdrchris@gmail.com
Phone: +2348063667566.

Abstract

This paper discusses the collaborative ministry of priests and religious in the Local Church. The Church has many ministries or services but one Lord. These apostolic works are done based on status and vocation. Sacramental characters received and charisms endowed place privileges and responsibilities on every member of the Church. Both the hierarchy and the lay faithful are called to the vineyard to work for the kingdom of Christ. This missionary situation calls for collaboration between and among members of the Church as Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious men and women and the laity. The findings of this paper reveal, among other things, that collaboration among priests and the religious in a Diocese increases the gains and harvests of mission while its lack suffocates the presence of robust apostolate. The paper recommends that the Diocesan clergy should not arrogate to themselves the exclusive ownership of the Diocese as if the religious are strangers in the affairs of their own Church. Again, the religious should serve the Diocese with passion and zeal as paying allegiance to their congregations or foundations at the detriment of the Local Church (Diocese) and of Missionary Agreements between both parties contradict the sanctity and spirituality of mission. The methodology

employed in this work is historic-descriptive approach which means that collaboration between the priests and the religious in the Local Church of Nsukka was studied over time and hereby presented with its abundant positive pastoral effects in the Diocese and beyond.

Key words: Collaboration, Ministry, Priesthood, Religious, Local Church.

Introduction

Collaborative ministry is the in-thing now. If our apostolate must be according to the mind of Christ, we must collaborate in our ministry as priests and religious in obedience to his will and in emulation of his example. Christ did not want to do it alone; all by himself. Christ is God, he can do all things yet he chose people to work with him and to work with him meant to collaborate with him; to collaborate with him meant to share responsibilities. Therefore, collaboration goes with co-responsibility. In the music world we hear "co-labor, co-labor, co-labor" and in the animal kingdom, because in African cosmology expressed in folklores or mythology, animals *speak,* we hear from *Okwa, the bush fowl*: "co-operate, co-operate, co-operate, co-operate", and the common African toad would croak "bro, bro, bro, bro" like a reminder to the *presbyterium* of the imperative of brother priests' unique fraternity. In unique fraternity, love which is an underpinning virtue of collaboration is implicated positively because in its truest practice solidarity, unity and charity are harvested in plenitude.

In the Bible, we read that Jesus chose the twelve and the seventy two and sent them on mission in pairs (Matthew 10:1-16, Luke 10:1-16), and in Acts 13: 2-5 the Holy Spirit set Paul and Barnabas out for mission as a pair in order to collaborate, co-operate, and share responsibilities. On this mission, John Mark acted as their assistant. The missionaries moved into the apostolic field as a team; that was in conscious partnership and apostolic

synergy. In the world of sports, let us just talk about football-eleven versus eleven: goals are scored most often and more frequently when there is collaboration. In fact, the essential nature of team work and its demands confer a name on sports group; hence football team, volleyball team and basketball team. In this light we see that another name for this collaboration is team work. So, football is football team work, volley ball team work and basketball team work, and so on. As goals are scored because the players collaborate, missionary goals are achieved when there is collaboration by the missionaries.

Modern psychologists, economists, pastoral theologians, sociologists, researchers and anthropologists emphasize team work. The secret of football's fertility that births goals is based also in this great power of team work. In this paper, we shall strive to discuss the theology of collaboration. This discourse on collaborative ministry of priests and religious in the diocese has the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, a local Church as its pastoral context.

Conceptualization of Key words

It is good for one to know the referent values attached to these concepts found to be key to this work. This we shall do through their conceptualization.

Priests/Priesthood

Priests here refer exclusively to those in the hierarchy of the Church especially the first and the second, namely the Bishops *(episcopoi)* and the priests *(presbyteroi).* The Bishops have the fullness of the priesthood in the order of Bishops. The episcopal ministry takes on the second rank of sacerdotal orders which is subsumed by it and makes if full. Hence, in the Bishop one sees the fullness of the priesthood. The priests, the presbyters occupy the second rank in the hierarchical structure of the Church. They are next to the bishops in rank and are their immediate collaborators. So

these men are ordained priests by the bishops who are in communion with the Holy Father, the Pope in the sacrament of Holy Orders (*Orders di Aso);* therefore their ministry is ordained ministry. The priest, *presbyter*, *sacerdos,* is *alter Christus (another Christ)*. The priest is he (which means a male) who offers sacrifice to the Most High God empowered by Holy Orders. These by virtue of their ministry are called ministerial priests. In Catholic priesthood, one finds the Old Testament priesthood and the New Testament priesthood of Christ in every individual priest of the New Covenant. In the tribe and line of ministerial or ordained priesthood, we have the diocesan clergy and the religious who are clerics.

In the discourse on the priesthood, we must recognize that by virtue of their baptismal character, the lay faithful are priests also but they are not ministerial or ordained priests but are in the status of universal priesthood that is, the common priesthood of Christ's lay faithful. The scriptural foundation of the priesthood of the laity is in 1 Peter 2:9. The priests we refer to in this work are the ministerial priests.

The Religious

As the name implies, they are people drawn from the hierarchical structure and the lay faithful**.** The 1983 Code of the Canon Law says: "By divine institution, among Christ's faithful there are in the Church sacred ministers, who in law are also called clerics; the others are lay people" (207 #1). Again, "Drawn from both groups are those of Christ's faithful who, professing the evangelical counsels through vows and other sacred bonds recognized and approved by the Church, are consecrated to God in their own special way and promote the salvific mission of the Church. Their state, although it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, does pertain to its life and holiness (207 # 2, *Vatican 11 Lumen Gentium* 44-45). Canon 588 # 1 states: "In itself, the state of consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay (see also *Perfectae Caritatis)*. Among the Religious, we have Members of Consecrated Life and Institutes of apostolic Life. These can be male religious or female

religious, actives and contemplatives. In Nsukka Diocese, we also have the personal prelature – the Opus Dei.

Collaborative Ministry

The concept "collaborative ministry" has two constituent philological parts; namely: "collaborative" and "ministry". "Collaborative" is the adjectival expression of the noun "collaboration" whose Latin derivative stems from the verb *"collaborare",* a compound word got from an assimilated form of "com" a prefix which means "with" and *"laborare*" which is "to work". So, etymologically, it means "to work with", that is "to co-labour"; hence "to collaborate". In this sense it implies "an act of working together". By this understanding "collaboration" has "co-operation" as a synonym whose meaning is "to operate together", a concept that has the referent values of co-action, synergy, partnership, teamwork, joint action, participation, shared responsibility, co-responsibility and working together.

"Minister" is derived from the Latin noun "minister" which means "servant". In this sense, it means "servanthood" in the Church, in ecclesiastical circles or in the religious sphere. It is in this restricted, specific or particular dimension that it should be understood in this paper. "Minister" is a noun and a person while "ministry" denotes his "office", "portfolio", "job descriptions", "roles", "activities", "actions" or "services". "Ministry" in pre-conciliar ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council had reference largely to ordained ministry but the conciliar and post-conciliar theology of the Church gives it a new inclusive approach that describes as "ministry" the service, *diakonia* of Christ's lay faithful. This fresh understanding was informed by the New Testament that reveals ministries in their varieties and structures like apostolic calling, prophecy, charity, administration, evangelization, teaching, *et cetera* (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11, Romans 12: 6-8, Ephesians 4: 11-16). The variety of *charismata* (gifts, charisms) in the Church and the need to apply all these gifts to mission for

God's glory and for the salvation of all are fundamentals to collaborative ministry.

"Collaborative Ministry" is described by Sheerin (2001) as "the joining together in an appropriate, non-competitive. non-controlling way, so that all who have dedicated themselves to the Gospel may do the truth together in love, without blocking or frustrating one another, without suppressing diverse talents and skills, without being bound to false notions of tradition or status"(Ndagoso, 2004:2-3). He went further to conceptualize it as "the shared apostolate of the laity, clergy and the religious – male and female – in planning, reviewing and doing all that belongs to the ministry of Christ" (Gangwari, 2004: 43). In the words of Oso (2004:19), "Collaborative ministry" means "allowing everybody; the priests, religious, the laity to work together with a collegial mind set in the Lord's vineyard". It is "a call for a deliberate effort to enable all Christians to respond to their baptismal call and engage in ministry with others in the Christian community" (Fazing, 2004:27).

In the light of the above, collaborative ministry is the missionary action of the whole Church as people of God who work together in partnership and co-responsibility to realize the missionary mandate. Both the hierarchy and the laity as the ministers and pastoral agents respectively in the service of the Holy Mother Church constitute the initiators and implementers of collaborative ministry according to the pastoral landscape of their respective ecclesial communities.

Local Church

The Diocese is a Local Church. It is also called a particular Church as different from the Universal Church whose critical part it is. Canon 369 defines a Diocese as "a portion of the people of God, which is entrusted to a Bishop to be nurtured by him, with the cooperation of the *presbyterium,* in such a way that, remaining close to its pastor and gathered by him through

the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it constitutes a particular Church. In this Church, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ truly exists and functions". "Local" here does not mean lack of refinement which arose from naturalness and therefore bereft of artificiality. It is not also driven by primitivism in social ecology and in this sense conceived as "local setting" *(adigboroja, local product, Igbo-made)* and therefore inferior compared to "foreign" which is mistaken often to be better in more frameworks than one in Nigeria.

"Local" in context is driven from the Latin *"Locus"* which means "place, a locality, a definite geo-space". The overseer of a local Church is one in the rank of the Bishopric; hence he is also called Local Ordinary. "Ordinary" here does not mean "common" but rather "normal", "proper to" his office, person and status. So, the Bishop has ordinary executive powers of governance, sanctification and prophetic mission. Those who have extra-ordinary executive powers are lower in rank or status as they are co-opted from the outside the normal to carry out a specific function. Examples include the men and women religious who are not in the clerical state but serve after due training as extra-ordinary ministers of the Most Holy Eucharist.

Theology of Collaborative Ministry

In this section we shall have a tripartite approach; namely: the Scripture, the Magisterium and theological opinions in our discourse on collaborative ministry.

a. The Scripture

Our primary text in Christian Theology is the Holy Bible; therefore we shall appeal to its authority in our discourse. In the Old Testament we see collaboration in the Trinitarian Communion at creation and the re-creation at redemption in the New Testament. The Most Holy Trinity is origin of collaboration. God said "let us make man in our own image and likeness"

(Genesis 1: 26). When God (*Abba*) created with his Word (*Dabar*), his Spirit (*Ruach)* was present which hovered over the waters and was breathed into the nostrils of clay (*Adamah)* who became *Adam,* he who was fashioned from the ground became a living being (Genesis 1:1-24, 2:7). The above narratives reveal the *mysterium* of the Trinitarian indivisibility in the triune community of persons and in the unity of operations. In the words of Heywood (2018:3-4): "True collaboration is an expression of God's nature. The Trinity is the original of all collaborative ministry. God's mission to the world involves Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in full and loving co-operation. When we look at Jesus' earthly ministry, we are struck first of all by his obedience to the Father. "The Son can do only what he sees the Father doing," he says (John 5:19), and, "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Secondly, we are struck by his empowering by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who descends upon him at his baptism (Luke 3:22), leads him into the wilderness (Luke 4:14) to announce, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18). Later Jesus says of the Spirit, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:15). In the Mission of Jesus we see Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together in perfect love and perfect harmony". This is *Trinitarian Collaboration*.

In Exodus 18:13-26, we read about Moses' appointment of capable and God-fearing men from the ranks of the Israelites to become leaders of different numerical strengths of the population - thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens to collaborate with him and share in his responsibility of justice administration. The inspiration came from his father-in-law who saw the tiresomeness, the heavy burdens and the impending ineffectiveness of Moses and advised him to discern talents and distribute roles accordingly. Moses heeded his advice and became a wise, efficient and effective leader.
In the New Testament, Jesus chose his apostles and disciples and sent them in pairs on mission (Matthew 10: 1-16, Luke 9:1-6, Luke 10: 1-16, Mark 6: 7-13). They were sent as a team to collaborate in the apostolic ministry. In the

election of seven men of faith and of good reputation, filled with Holy Spirit and wisdom, on the great event of the institution of the diaconate, it was necessitated by the need to increase capacities and capabilities through collaboration (Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7). The deacons' involvement in the collaborative ministry increased the spiritual value of the nascent Church and enlarged its coasts in the administration of social justice. The book of the *Acts of the Apostles* is replete with instances of collaborative ministry of Paul and Barnabas (11:27-30, 13: 1-3), Paul, Barnabas and John Mark (12:24-25), Paul and Silas (15:36-40), Paul and Timothy (16:1-5) and so on. It is good to underscore the *pneumatological d*imension of collaborative ministry under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who said "I want Barnabas and Paul set apart for the work to which I have called them" and earlier at creation and baptism of the Lord was present on both occasions.

Pauline ecclesiology has rich explanations of collaborative ministry in his epistles where he celebrates the ideas of unity in diversity, multiplicity of gifts, *koinonia*- communion and the use of these gifts at the services of the Holy Mother Church (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Romans 12 3-8, Ephesians 4:1-16). Pauline idea of *Koinonia* depicts fellowship, partnership, communion, sharing, etc as other ways of expressing collaborative ministry in his thought and theology (Frazing, 2004:30). We safely say that collaborative ministry has a robust biblical foundation as the above discourse has shown.

b. The Magisterium

This is the teaching authority of the Church. The Church is Mother and Teacher. As mother, she teaches her children faith and morals, arts and sciences. In this section, we shall present the teachings of the Church on collaborative ministry. The magisterium is of two types: Universal and local magisterial teachings. The former is the teachings of the Popes and the ecumenical councils which have, of course, characters of catholicity while the latter is that of the Bishops. In the magisterium one gets the most orthodox interpretation of the Holy Scripture.

The Conciliar Fathers of the Second Vatican Council teach that the Church is the People of God (*Lumen Gentium),* and that the Laity have their apostolate in the Church and in the world (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) given to them by virtue of their baptism as they received the triple munera called: *munus sanctificandi, munus docendi et munus regendi (*sanctifying, prophetic and royal offices/powers). In addition, they teach the missionary character of the Church as an activity that involves all the members of the Church who are all missionaries (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*). This new image of the Church has a marked shift from the pyramidal structure of the Church to the Church as Communion, from the Church as the Church of the clergy (*uka fada*) to our Church, the Catholic Church of all (*omnes cleroi et laoi).* With the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, there came a new face of laicology and the emergence of pastoral councils – Diocesan, Deanery, Parish, Chaplaincy and Station. These Pastoral Councils are organs of collaboration, partnership and shared responsibility. The clergy and the lay faithful meet as one family of God (*Ecclesia in Africa*) to initiate, plan and executive pastoral actions. In this new phase of the Church, the laity have started to assume functions in the areas of their expertise and competence which hitherto was occupied by the hierarchy alone. We give the examples of these areas as finance, education and extra-ordinary ministry of the Most Holy Eucharist, to mention but three.

Archbishop Ndagoso (2004:5-6) wrote on the relationship between the diocesan Clergy and the religious thus: "The decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops in the Church *(Christus Dominus)* for example, declared that, "Organized cooperation should be encouraged between the various religious institutes and between them and the diocesan clergy. There should be the closest possible coordination of all pastoral activities". He went on to teach that, …" a 1978 document of two Sacred Congregations of the Vatican called for efforts 'to be made to renew the bond of fraternity and cooperation between the diocesan clergy and the communities of the

religious,' saying further that, ' great importance should therefore be placed on all those means, even though simple and formal, which serve to increase mutual trust, apostolic solidarity and fraternal harmony'" (*Christus Dominus*, 35 and *Mutuae Relationes*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, No. 29 (583), July 20, 1978). He went further to recall the address of Pope John Paul 11 during his maiden pastoral visit to Nigeria in 1982 who "called for collaboration between religious congregations and the local church. He counseled that instead of running parallel apostolates, the entire diocese, that is, priests, religious and the laity should coordinate its apostolic plans and strategy and give corporate witness to Christ" (Pope John Paul 11, *Address to Religious of Nigeria*, Ibadan: SS Peter and Paul). The Diocesan Bishop is the overseer (*episcopus*) of all apostolic labours in his diocese. He is the coordinator of the ministry of his priests, religious sisters and brothers and the laity as the chief shepherd of God's flock entrusted to his care.

On the subject matter, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) directed with the notes that:

- We acknowledge that the presence of the various Religious families in a given diocese is a clear manifestation of the spirit of communion, collaboration and co-responsibility as it affords them the opportunity for joint action and witnessing.
- In their bid towards this communion, collaboration and co-responsibility, there is need for a clearly defined "Memorandum of Understanding" MoU or contract that will be respected by both parties. Such mutual relations should take cognizance of the specific apostolate of each religious family. Both parties as well as their representatives are to familiarize themselves with the terms of the MoU and as such exhibit commitment to improving the relations based on canonical provisions.
- Dioceses that have Religious families are to clearly define and develop welfare scheme that will be stipulated in the MoU and must be seen to be committed to these terms. Principle of justice

should be respected in the remuneration of religious families working for respective Dioceses.

- Dioceses are to create opportunity for interaction between the Diocesan Clergy and the various Religious Families within the diocese. This will help to build inter-personal relationship as well as help to overcome biases and prejudices. Such interaction also will afford Bishops the opportunity for public appreciation of the various Religious families.
- Dioceses should support on-going formation of clergy, Religious and consecrated persons working in the diocese. However, care must be taken that this is done in collaboration with the congregation. When such is done, congregations are to reciprocate such gestures by allowing such personnel to render services to dioceses that have supported their training.
- Religious families are to display equal level of professionalism and zeal for institutions they work for be it congregational or Diocesan. Effort should be made to overcome the obvious disparity in the area of commitment to management of diocesan institutions as against congregational institutions. We advocate for a spirit of communion, collaboration and co-responsibility in the management and financing of diocesan institutions.
- Success to a great extent is dependent on team work. The Church, family of God in Nigeria values team work and thus, collaborative ministry. The Church will consciously work to reduce the tendencies of clericalism so as to enhance collaborative ministry and make it more realizable (CBCN 2012, *Acta* 66-72, Pp 155-156).

One of the rich gains of collaborative ministry is the eradication of clerical *triumphalism* and laical *clique-ism* in the pastoral life of the Church. This advantage is accessed by the docility, sincerity and the ability to key into

this new face of Church pastoral administration by ministers and pastoral agents.

In the words of the Bishop of Kyoto Diocese, Japan, Bishop Paul Otsuka Yoshinao (2001:1, 4) *Letter* on the New Year's Day, he wrote about the groupings of his 57 parishes "into *Collaborative Ministry for Mission* regions". What this means is that "every parish will belong to one of these regions, so there will no longer be any completely independent parishes". He maintained that: "The ultimate starting point for parish *Collaborative Ministry for Mission* is that priests themselves work as a team. Up to now there has always been a Parish Priest appointed to a parish (sometimes with one or more curates to help). In that case, this single Parish Priest made practically all the decisions about what was to be done in the parish. In the case of *Collaborative Ministry for Mission* several priests form a team and, as a team of priests, decide about each member's role and divide up their responsibility to provide for priestly leadership. In *Collaborative Ministry for Mission*, the priests do not achieve their ministry of service to the Church community as 'individual priests'; they relate to the Christian Community as a team. In this way they will be able to compensate for one another's lack of ability and physical limitations in giving leadership".

According to the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka, Bishop Godfrey Igwebuike Onah (2019: i): "As God's co-workers in the erection of this spiritual building, it is important that we renew our commitment to work together, as a team and with a common intent – unity of purpose. However gifted we may be as individuals, it is only as one body of Christ, held together by the Holy Spirit, that we can avoid a repeat of the Babel experience (*Gen* 11:1-9). But however varied and variegated our gifts may be, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we shall be united in proclaiming, by word and deed, *magnalia Dei (Acts* 2:4-11*),* as one undivided body of Christ (1 *Cor* 12). While avoiding all forms of over-centralization and macromanagement, it is nevertheless, unhealthy for any Parish or Chaplaincy to think that it can

pursue its projects alone, to the exclusion of the rest of the Diocese. *Anyi bu ezinuno Chukwu"*. In this light he preaches the twin principles of subsidiarity and solidarity in his Diocese. He went further to remind his priests of another expression of collaboration in these words: "The practice of exchanging priests within the Deanery on the last Sunday of every month, which has now become a norm throughout the Diocese, should help every priest to always see the entire Diocese, not just the place where he is presently assigned, as the vineyard of the Lord in which he is invited to work" (*Personnel Postings 2019 – 2020*).

The post-conciliar ecclesiology calls for greater communion between priests and the Bishops, Bishops and the Pope, Priests and Priests, Priests and the Religious, the Religious and the Religious, the clergy and the laity, men and women, adults, the youths and the children (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI; *Redemptoris Missio, Christifideles Laici, Pastores Dabo Vobis, Ecclesia in Africa, Vita Consecrata, Veritas Splendour* Pope John Paul 11; *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis).

The Holy Father, Pope Saint John Paul 11(1995) describes the Church in Africa as "the family of God", an image that captures the very roots and positive cultural values in Africa such as "participation, solidarity and community life". Therefore, it is a theological value when the diocesan clergy, members of consecrated life and institutes of apostolic life in Nigeria or on the continent have communion among themselves and live in solidarity and love; and see each other as members of a nuclear family or extended family (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 63 & 42). In *Christifideles Laici,* the Pope gave the magisterial interpretation of "you too go into my vineyard" (Matthew 20: 3-6) as a divine invitation to both the hierarchy and the lay faithful to work in his apostolic fields, each in his or her task. On this note, therefore, he asked the Pastors to "acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their *foundation in the sacraments of Baptism, and Confirmation* and indeed, for a good many of them,

in the *Sacrament of Matrimony.* So he encouraged the "Pastors to entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of orders" (Pope John Paul 11, 1988, 2 & 23). By this *magisterium*, the Universal Shepherd teaches the need for collaboration between the clergy, religious and the lay faithful.

According to Pope Benedict XVI (2012:1), "Co-responsibility requires a change in mentality, particularly with regard to the role of the laity in the Church, who should be considered not as "collaborators" with the clergy but as persons truly "co-responsible" for the being and activity of the Church. It is important, therefore, that a mature and committed laity be united, who are able to make their own specific contribution to church's mission, in accordance with the ministries and tasks each has in the life of the Church, and always in cordial communion with the bishops." The Supreme Pontiff's central message is on the need for "ecclesial and social co-responsibility" of the laity alongside of the clergy. (*Address* to the 6th assembly of the International Catholic Action Forum, Castel Gandolfo, 10 August 2012). Pope Benedict XVI is in line with magisterial teachings of the Second Vatican Council and of his predecessor Pope John Paul 11 on the mission and status of the laity in the church and on the urgent need for their co-responsibility in the Church Mission both in the Church and in the secular arena.

In the words of Pope Francis (2015) "Our challenge today is to build on those solid foundations and to foster a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in planning for the future of our parishes and institutions. This does not mean relinquishing the spiritual authority with which we have been entrusted; rather, it means valuing the immense contribution which women, lay and religious, have made and continue to make, to the life of our communities"(Homily, Philadelphia, p.1). Recently, the **Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria** (2019:1) issued a communique wherein they pledged communion and collaboration to Pope Francis, thus: "We

reaffirm our faith in and commitment to the Pontificate of the Holy Father Pope Francis. Consequently, we pledge our loyalty and availability to him in the exercise of his Petrine Office, and we promise to continue to cooperate with him fully in the discharge of his divine mandate as the Pastor of the Universal Church (*cf Code of Canon Law, Cann.* 331,334)".

All the conciliar and post-conciliar ecclesiology got juridical status through the provisions of the 1983 Code of the Canon Law. On the collaboration between the clergy and the religious, the ***Code*** says: "Organised cooperation is to be fostered among different institutes, and between them and the secular clergy. Under the direction of the Bishop, there is to be a coordination of all apostolic works and actions with due respect for the character and purpose of each institute and the laws of its foundation" (*Code of Canon Law*, 680). The apostolate of the Members of Consecrated Life and Institutes of Apostolic Life is guided by their ministry to the diocese and the ministry of the diocese to them. Without prejudice to the rights of religious superiors stipulated in Canon 678, pars. 2 and 3, all the "Works which the diocesan Bishop entrusts to religious are under the authority and direction of the Bishop …" (*Code of Canon Law*, 681, par.1). There are mutuality, availability, charity, honesty and co-responsibility in this apostolic partnership between the religious and dioceses where they serve and these virtues should be upheld by both parties at all times and circumstances.

c. Theological opinions

Some theologians have thoughts on collaborative ministry borne out of personal reflections or as seen in their write-ups on the subject matter or as the fruits of their informal interactions or the outcomes harvested from their formal fora like theological conferences, symposia, seminars and the likes. Such opinions shall occupy this section.

On collaborative ministry in the Nigerian Context, Nwagbala (2013: 108) wrote that, "The new definition of the Church today which goes back to the Vatican 11 calls for collaborative ministry. The whole responsibility for spreading the Gospel and the education and sanctification of the faithful does not rest on the priest's shoulders alone. The Church belongs to all the members". McGarry (1993:109-110) put this view succinctly thus: "This newly rediscovered vision by no means diminishes the importance of ordained ministry in the Church. Nevertheless it does change the common way of seeing the priest and the bishop and their own way of being and acting. Therefore Christians and their pastors are brothers and sisters, equal in dignity, having different ministries, and sharing responsibility in solidarity for the life and mission of the church". Still on the Nigerian context, a Religious woman, Uchem (2006: 4-5, 7), wrote that the problem around the identity of the religious has to be solved before a meaning principle or practice of collaborative ministry can emerge. She bemoaned that many bishops and priests do not know nor understand the identity of the religious who mistakenly believe that they are lay people. This informs the reason for relegations they suffer during prayers of the faithful and in other critical moments in the life of the church where they are forgotten instead of remembered, given tasks that do not engage them maximally in the life of the Church. She appealed to the magisterial documents of Vatican 11 and post-conciliar Synodal document, *Vita Consecrata* to conclude that the consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay… (no. 57). She therefore averred, "Thus, we cannot even begin to talk about collaborative ministry until we have talked about collaborative 'being'. There is need to review how we have been and how we are, and when we have accepted one another as full members of the church then we can begin to talk about collaborative ministry in the Church". However, she went on to describe collaborative ministry as "an intentional move whereby lay men and women as well as religious – where these are present in a parish – are motivated and empowered to exercise ministry in partnership with their priest. In other words they are proactively encouraged to be involved in

more responsible pastoral leadership roles than contributing money or dressing the altar, as the case may be".

Ebuziem (2012:41-42, 46) sees the Igbo traditional pattern of government, that is the Igbo republicanism or *ohacracy* that put much premium on the *oha,* the representatives of the people *(Umunna)* as an idea which the present concept of the Pastoral Councils portrays. According to him, "The *Igbo Umunna oha*cratic set-up is not *contra ecclesiam* (against the Church) in the vision of Vatican 11, but *pro ecclesia (*for the Church*).*Since *Umunna* Church Community (UCC) is a bridge between the traditional *Umunna* and the Catholic Community, *oha*cracy is the best style of leadership in the Igbo Church. As a people who stand to be empowered from a bottom-up approach, the *Umunna* Church Community needs cooperation as a key to its success. Cooperation is needed both by the people and the leaders. Leaders of the *Umunna* as well as the *Umunna* must learn to cooperate in order to rise and succeed as a people. The Igbo have a saying that "if the mortar and the pestle cooperate very well, the *fufu* will be well pounded". Thus, for the *umunna*, cooperation is the keyword for getting anything done". This theological opinion has the *logoi spermatikoi* for contextualized frameworks of Igbo Local Theology and inculturation process. However, there is now a tilt towards *umunne* ecclesiology in Igbo Church of today, at least as the new *usoro emume missa* holds in its words and rubrics.

There are some fundamental factors that make or mar collaborative dispositions. Our collaborative ministry hinge on these dispositions. One is the idea of definition. The idea of definition: of priestly ministry, definition of the bishop, definition of fellow priests, and of the lay faithful. Why are you in the priesthood, why am I in the priesthood? My definition of priesthood helps me or unhelps me to taking my particular role in the vineyard with a firm resolve to collaborate with people, the co-workers. So if I am in the priesthood for example to do it all alone, I will not find it easy to collaborate with anybody. So the definition of priesthood for me is "all

alone". And when one begins to go alone, he definitely runs into difficulties with collaboration.

If the bishop by your definition is a friend, you will get committed to the affairs of his person, to the affairs of his episcopacy by collaborating with him. The bishop in his wisdom does not call us his servants. For Bishop Godfrey Igwebuike Onah none of his priests is his servant; he calls his priests his friends and the bishop calling his priests his friends is a rich Christological definition because in it you see Christological communion, in it you see a rich ecclesial dimension, in it you see collaboration. All of us feel so free with our friends without violating injuriously or formally each person's space, each person's respect, each person's justice that is his due according to his right. We have very close friends in the ministry, we enjoy friendship and that is sacerdotal communion and so the bishop who is the head calls us his friends which means he wants us to co-operate with him, he wants us to collaborate with him. And that is his own definition of us. The friendship between the Bishops and their priests boost collaboration in the Local Church. Therefore when we also in turn call him our friend and by so doing we are stepping into collaboration with him, stepping into co-operation with him, we are stepping into team work with him; even if unconsciously. Jesus Christ called his apostles his friends (John 15:15). On this relationship, Mba (1988:11, 13) wrote: "In the Preface of priestly ordination, priests are described as the cooperators with the episcopal order. The diocesan priest should look up to his Bishop with faith. A priest who is in cordial relation with his Bishop is a happy priest. He works in harmony with him. The thought of his Bishop does not turn his stomach. The Bishop's visit, even if unannounced, does not upset him or throw him off gear. He is not nervous in the presence of his Bishop. He may have his shortcomings. All people have them including his Bishop. The priest who makes an effort gets a lot of encouragement from his Bishop. He does not feel lonely or abandoned. No matter the youthful age of the Bishop, the priest feels like a son to him".

What is one's definition of his fellow priests? This definition could be "water must find its level" which means that some are not at his level but that person who is not of his level has been configured ontologically at sacred ordination. One is "another Christ" as a priest and he is another Christ too as one. The criteria for defining levels may be intelligence, material wealth, *charismata* (gifts, charisms), geo-spatial exposure like native-alien experiential dichotomy or canonical heights and because of this perception collaboration becomes impossible or gravely difficult, impeded and impaired with those one feels are not at same level, high or low; the superior-inferior perceptions.

One's definition of a fellow priest could be based on some indices of history. The so-defined becomes somebody one cannot take in either because of his history of birth, history of scandal, or even his physical look, and so he is disliked from his natural given and as a consequence the definer will not co-operate with him. It becomes even worse when by providence, the Bishop under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, brings them together under one roof in a particular parish or chaplaincy; or in one commission for some team roles; the commission will turn frigid by conscious commission or omission with the results of yielding insignificant harvests or nothing.

The definition of lay people can also prejudice collaboration. For some, *ha bu igwe aturu* (the flock, the herds of sheep) in the pejorative sense; mere peripheral members. However, the Laicology of the conciliar and post-conciliar ecclesiology describes them and gives them their proper place as the people of God *(Laos tou Theou).* Therefore clerical triumphalism tarnishes the great pastoral concerns of the Holy Mother Church in the virtues, recommendations and doctrines of collaboration. For others the lay people could be the sheep for the wool and the sheep for the meat, so what they contribute would be simply to sit down and keep quiet, to sit down and contribute finances, to sit down and take whatever is the crumb from

the master's table. But when we define the lay people as collaborators too, as co-operators in this work, you will respect their God-given dignity who told them "you too go into my vineyard" (Matthew 20:1-16, *Lumen Gentium, Apostolicam Actuositatem, Christifideles Laici, Pastores Dabo Vobis).*

The Bishop is in the missionary field as an overseer (*episcopus)*, the priests are in the vineyard as elders (*presbyteroi)*, the deacons *(diakonoi)* are in the field to share the apostolic spiritual and material wealth and as lay persons *(laoi)* in the vineyard too as pastoral agents according to their status and vocation. Everybody is important in that vineyard and all of us have to co-operate, we have to collaborate in co-responsibility to answer God's call with our talents, so that the beauty of our church will become truly Christian.

Another thing that makes or mars collaboration is background. Where am I coming from, where am I going? I am a prince, I am poor, I am sinful, I am too holy, I am recognized, I am unrecognized, I am a first class brain, I am a tenth class brain, these things help us to co-operate or not to co-operate while on mission. There is mystery in posting of priests. There is no mathematics in posting of clerics, the leading church personnel in the diocese, the local church and the universal church at large. These backgrounds arouse interpretations based on perceptions, knowledge and goals which support or scatter collaboration. Very close to the factor of background is one's interpretation of state of affairs.

Another factor that helps us in our collaborative ministry is our ability to interpret properly. Interpretations of events, postings, assignments, opportunities, for instances, play major roles in our dispositions for collaboration. So let missionaries begin to interpret with consultations, interpret with proper values of experience, let us interpret with positive touch of expertise, and most importantly with the honest yardstick of our priesthood and spiritual values.

Nsukka Diocese: Our Local Context

Nsukka Diocese is currently in the phase of its second episcopacy under the dynamic apostleship and Shepherding of Father Bishop Godfrey Igwebuike Onah. The first Bishop of the Diocese is Bishop Emeritus, Francis Ogbonnaya Okobo whose prime episcopacy laid its missionary foundations. The Diocese has priests, deacons, religious men and women and the laity under the pastoral care of the Bishop.

There are many religious houses in the Diocese. These include "Holy Ghost Congregation, Discalced Carmelites, Brothers of St. Stephen, St. Joseph's Monastic Community, Daughters of Divine Love Sisters, Immaculate Heart Sisters, Holy Rosary Sisters, University Sisters of Assumption, Carmelite Missionary Sisters and Sisters Servants of the Visitation, Sisters of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration, Marist Daughters of Jesus the Good Shepherd and Missionary Daughters of Iwene Tansi. Also present in the Diocese is the Prelature of Opus Dei..." situated at Obollo Road, Obukpa. (*2019 Diary & Directory*, Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, P.13).The presence of these religious men and women are marked with various chapters of collaboration in the pastoral life of the Diocese.

They serve in the Parishes, Schools, Retreat and Conference Centre, Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Centres, Offices of Diocesan character as Vicars for the Religious and senator-membership of the Presbyterial Council (Bishops' senate), Secretariat staff, University Apostolate, Hospital Administration, Youth Apostolate, Chaplains, Seminary Formation, Bakery and Self-reliance enterprises, Extra-ordinary Ministers of the Most Holy Eucharist, Confessors, among other ministries. Some of these areas represent their ministry to the Diocese while the rest are strictly for their respective congregations in line with their disciplines, charisms and foundations.

The Diocese in turn has ministry to them in the areas of liturgy, hospitality, security, pastoral concerns and care, charities, sports, financial assistances and salaries, pastoral assignments, canonical obligations and rights, education, scholarships and health, to mention but these. The collaborative ministry between the clergy and the religious has been mutual and satisfactory in many ways. On the occasion of February 2nd every year, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the Diocese celebrates the religious men and women in grand style both in the solemnity of the liturgy and in the social festive dimensions. There is a collection, financial and other materials, for consecrated persons on the immediate Sunday after this feast throughout the entire Diocese. Some of their houses, based on peculiar needs, are beneficiaries of the fruits of the annual *Cathedraticum* and the Bishop's Pastoral visits. To mark the Christmas, the Bishop, his diocesan clergy as *unum presbyterium* and the religious men and women celebrate this redemptive feast of the incarnation as one family of God in the Diocese. However, the area of grave concern is in the fact of multiplicity of fake and pseudo-congregations which dots the history of Catholicism in Nigeria and elsewhere. Nsukka Diocese has a share in the experience of this unfortunate, ugly datum. Many self-styled, unsent founders want to begin religious congregations on the instrumentality of conscious violations of all the known canonical legislation in that regard. Their approaches include surreptitious erection of religious houses in the neighbourhood from where they recruit their victims or touch down as hawks to cart away the unsuspecting young men and women who feel God's call to religious vocation. They present their cards as coming from Cameroon, Italy or other places with cloudy identities. These, like Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:1-4), have done great harm to persons, families, genuine faith and to the corporate image of religious congregations. On this note Bishop Godfrey Igwebuike Onah (2016: no.8, p.2) addressed the Pastoral Council in these words: "According to Church law, no religious group is permitted to establish in a Diocese without the express permission of the Local Ordinary. Families and communities are therefore advised to get a **written**

clearance from the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka through their Parish Priest before offering their parcels of land to religious persons **within Nsukka Diocese**. Some unsuspecting families have been conned by false religious groups or by Priests, Monks, Brothers and Sisters who are acting against the regulations of the Church and outside her fold". Later Father Bishop Onah addressed the *Presbyterium* thus: "During the same plenary meeting, the Bishops had time to reflect with some Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life in Nigeria on the problems posed by the mushrooming of new religious Institutes, some of which are established for very dubious reasons. Bishops and Priests and the Religious are called upon to be vigilant. Be reminded that religious Institutes or persons are not allowed to establish or work in the Diocese without ***formal*** approval by the Local Ordinary. Parish Priests have to watch out for and sensitize the lay faithful about persons claiming to be Religious who acquire lands and develop them without any reference at all to the Bishop. In the same vein, **all banns for diaconate ordination coming from any of the new clerical religious Institutes should not be published in the Churches without a letter of introduction from the Bishop of the Diocese where the Institute is founded and a *nulla osta* from me"** (2016, no. 6, p.2).

In addition to the above *caveat,* Father Bishop has asked his priests to insist on the *celebret* of visiting, unknown clerical figures who want to administer the sacraments and on the strict functioning of the trained extra-ordinary ministers of the Most Holy Eucharist in order to curb the menace of false ones who may infiltrate the Diocese in various colours of religious habits.
Another approach is impersonation. Some have faked that they were priests of *"this or that"* congregation or even as the clergy of far distant dioceses especially in the northern parts of Nigeria suffering from Boko Haram insurgency while others in the female cadre presented themselves as sisters who needed suitable assistances; all these ploys were for fraudulent purposes as they came to be known that they were never priests nor nuns. These experiences may have affected the smooth relationship with some

genuine ones who may have had good reasons to be attended to. Therefore there is need for robust cooperation and collaboration between the clergy and the religious to close gaps against the wolves in sheep's clothing.

Recommendations/Conclusion

The Diocesan Clergy should resist the temptation of exclusive mentality against the Religious as they could pride themselves as the "sole owners" of the diocese, their canonical domain of incardination. This is because the Religious cannot be outsiders, strangers and non-family members in the Family of God, the Church – *Ekklesia tou Thou*. In like manner, the Religious should not see themselves as mercenary who are mere hired servants and as a consequence refuse to pay good attention to the principle and practice of good shepherding roles. In this mode and molding of erroneous understanding, some religious pay undue allegiance to their congregations at the expense of the diocese and by that token perpetrate injurious violations against justice, the diocesan rights and pastoral structures. The dictum: "I am for the Diocese" and another: "I am for the Congregation" as a repetition of "I am for Paul, I am for Apollos" (1 Corinthians 3: 4) contradicts *koinonia* and unity, fraternity and solidarity which are the fruits of collaborative ministry in the Church – *Qahal Yahweh*. Collaborative ministry between the diocese and the religious congregation must have the canonical fundamentals and pastoral marks of mutuality. This will help sustain shared values, shared purpose, shared process in shared responsibility and promote love, understanding and commitment to the course of pastoral actions as initiated. Love of God, love one's neighbor and obedience to the Church are indispensable virtues in collaborative ministry. Both the Priests and the Religious should draw lessons from the Tower of Babel event where lack of collaboration led to project failures (Genesis 11:1-9) so as to co-operate as partners and apostolic co-workers in the Lord's vineyard in coordinated dispensation of responsibilities for bountiful pastoral harvests. They should also be aware that the Holy Spirit is a principal partner in missionary tasks.

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