

PRIESTHOOD:

A VOCATION AND OCCUPATION FOR REV. FR. PROF. DR. CHRISTIAN ANIEKE

(A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT IN THE LAST 10 YEARS AS THE PROVOST OF IECE)

By

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PRIESTHOOD: A VOCATION OR OCCUPATION?

Through the ages, it is believed that knowledge proceeds from simple to complex, known to unknown. In view of this, a brief explanation of these main concepts – **vocation, occupation and priesthood** - will serve us right.

Vocation is a type of work or way of life that you believe is specially suitable for you (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). In other words, vocation is someone's calling. That is, it is not just an ordinary work one does for the sake of doing work, but it is the type of work one has life commitment to. For this reason, one's vocation is always believed to be the job which was chosen by God for the individual.

On the other hand, occupation is one's job or profession. In most cases, it is the job one does with the skills acquired in the course of training. Quite unlike vocation, there may not be any serious life attachment to the job. In other words, one does it as a mere means of livelihood. On a second sense, occupation may be regarded as the way in which one spends one's time especially leisure times.

Etymologically speaking, the word priesthood is from the Greek word *presbyteros*, which contractedly means "Elder". Again, it can be equated with the Latin word *sacerdos*, which means the Roman officiate at the sacrifice and sacred rites. A priest is born and made. He is the mediator between man God, sacred or divine and the profane. As the maintainer of the equilibrium between the two beings in human society, he stabilizes the social structures and the cultic organization.

The Encyclopedia Britanica defines a priest as:

A ritual expert, the one who has a special and sometimes secret knowledge of the techniques of worship, including incantation, prayer, sacrificial act, songs and other acts that are believed to bridge the separation between the divine or sacred and profane realms.

From the above explanations, you will understand in the course of this writing where best to place priesthood especially as it concerns **Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Christian Aneke**, the provost of Institute of Ecumenical Education in the last 10 years.

FORMATION AND BASIC DUTIES OF A PRIEST

Throughout the ages, and across all society, the procession into priesthood has being an up-to-the-hill task. Because of the rigorous processes involved in priesthood and the special knowledge possessed by the priest, it cannot be compared by other religious and cultic leader such as the magician, Shaman (healer and visionary), diviner or prophet who obtains their position by means of individual efforts (e.g. learning from a master magician or diviner, individual ecstatic experiences that are publicly recognized)

Firstly, one of the tasks is to meet up the socio-cultural criteria. For instance, in certain types of society, the office and functions of a priest may be limited to those having a particular ancestry, those belonging to certain tribes (such as the Levite in Judaism), families (such as the Eumolpids of the Elcusinian mystry religion of Greece), or castes (such as the Brahmins in Hinduism), and those initiated into certain professional orders (such as the cure doctors among the Maya).

As if that is not enough, there are other personal qualities required of a person in various cultures for who would become members of priesthood. In Roman Catholicism and the Arcakes of the Digambara sect in Jainism, celibacy is the watch word. In various Buddhist group, asceticism and seclusion are the chief virtues. More still, some place emphasis on religious experiences as among some holiness protestant sects.

Having met or being prepared to meet the requirements as it concerns the Roman Catholic priesthood, one is sent to the seminary where priest are trained or made (having being born), for the function and duties ahead. This training takes as much as fifteen to eighteen years before one is ordained a priest. During this period, the candidates otherwise called seminarians are secluded from the secular world. They are mainly concerned with academics and spiritual things.

The religious functions of priests are quite varied. But the Encyclopedia Britanica summarized the specific role of a priest as the officiant of the rites that unites the sacred and the profane realms, the priests as a pantifex (Latin word for maker of a bridge) celebrates or administrates at the rituals of initiation into the cult of church, presides over ritual re-enactment of creative, redemptive or salvatory (salvation working) events and offers sacrifices to the gods or to one God. He also functions as a perpetuator of the sacred traditions, practices, and belief and as a teacher, healer, counselor and diviner.

Owning to the classical and rigorous training exposed to priest, they possess exceptional knowledge, which equips them to do, not just the reserved priestly work but also other secular works. We have priests now who are medical and academic doctors, lawyers, solders, academic professors, etc. the most amazing thing about this scenario is that they did not only see the extra job as occupation but they also take it as an integral part of their vocation. When asked why delving into every job, they will answer you that, as a social stabilizer, they need to be in all corners of the society to ensure a steady equilibrium.

VERY REV. FR. PROF. CHRISTIAN ANIEKE, A PRIEST PER EXCELLENCE

In the spirit of the above, **Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Christian Anieke**, the provost of Institute of Ecumenical Education and Vice Chancellor of Godfrey Okoye University, proves his case as a rare icon to the priesthood. Since his ten years as the provost of Institute of Ecumenical Education, he has worked assiduously to maintain a social equilibrium. He has not only distinguished himself as an academic genus, a first class material, but he has proved his worth in his ministerial activities as a Roman Catholic priest. For this I call him, *the priest among priests*

Priesthood for **Fr. Anieke** is a vocation and occupation. He is a born and made priest. This is evidenced by his giant strides in Institute of Ecumenical Educational; positively changing lives and aspirations of many people he has met within these ten years of his ministerial and academic work. These indeed, have not being and/or may not be achieved by anybody within the same range of time. In fact, this actually

answered the very simple but thought provoking question: **WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE?**

In 2006 when Fr. Anieke came for his rescue missions in Institute of Ecumenical Education, it was as if nothing good would ever come out the adventures he was set to embark on. As a student then, I can still recall his gentle but well determined movement when he was having a panoramic view of the *plain field* he would work on. At first, he started with us the students who were willing to serve as paid labourers during the holidays. This singular opportunity gave many of us, who could have dropped out of school for lack of school fees, the hope to continue since they can now pay their school fees. Those in extreme conditions, he gave outright scholarships to study to any length of their choice. Many of those are still on the scholarships till date. **Fr. Christian** really wiped the tears of many. Based on this, I call him, *the hope of the hopeless*.

In Nigeria, one of the serious challenges of administration is lack of sustenance of policies and programmes of the previous administrators. Any new leader will change overnight all the existing programmes of the former leaders just to be felt. This was not the same in the case of **Fr. Anieke**. I still recall his tinny voice telling me, as the then Prayer Moderator, to always tell him whenever it was time for mass as was scheduled on the timetable. He respects the timetable and the normal routine businesses of the school so much until it was time and necessary to modify and/or change them. He perfectly bridged the old and the new without any friction; hence I call him *programme stabilizer*.

The most outstanding and remarkable thing **Prof. Anieke** did was the building of a chapel of perpetual adoration in the school compound. For me, that was the highest achievement because prior to this, many of us, during the night, do our private prayers at the dark and empty classes. With the chapel, **Fr. Christian** connected us closer to God. He made prayer enjoyable and not coerced. He is prayerful and makes everyone around him prayerful. In fact, he led us closer to God by example. During our charismatic prayer meetings, he would come and pray for us and gave us all necessary support we needed. For this, **Prof. Anieke** proves that he is *a mediator between man and God*.

In fact, I cannot continue to recant my personal experiences with **Fr. Anieke** as a student and as a lecturer. As a matter of fact, I am begging for PhD now already was as a result of the inspiration I got from **Fr. Anieke**. He once said that he became a Professor in his early 40's in spite of his poor background. This made me to know that one with God is majority (**ojichukwu ji ihe nile**). He rewards excellence and

settles only for the best. He is a father to many; hence he is fondly called *Daddy* by all. To consolidate this, he was crowned *Nnadioramma 1 of Enugu state* in the maiden cultural day that was organized by him to encourage students to showcase their talents. He is different things for different people. Some describe and define him as goodness itself. That is, to say that he is good is an understatement.

Finally, **Rev. Fr. Prof. Dr. Christian Anieke**, is a man of his words. He is a man of integrity; trustworthy, compassionate, humble and an epitome of cleanliness. He inculcated the attitude of cleanliness in all us students that if anybody does something filthy, the other will fondly tell him that you are doing what is '*anti Fr. Christian*', '*unecumenical*' or '*malGodfrey*' Fr. Anieke is indeed God's sent to humanity and I'm happy that I belong to this generation that witnessed this rare gift.

May the Almighty God who sent you continue to guide and keep you for this generation until you finish the work He sent to you to do. Be rest assured that the legacies you laid down for us will forever follow us wherever we go. We are indeed showing the evidence. We say a **Very Big Thank You**.