

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALL SAINTS' ANGLICAN CHAPEL, DSC

1.0 BACKGROUND

The history of the All Saints' Anglican Chapel, DSC, can be logically said to begin with the decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria to situate a Greenfield Integrated Steel Plant in the virgin and isolated land between the then remote villages of Ovwian and Aladja near Warri in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Construction and erection of the premier Steel Plant, Delta Steel Complex, now Delta Steel Company, between September 1979 and January 1982 attracted professionals in their thousands from all over the country and abroad to this location. Over this period, tenatable accommodation was only possible in various locations in Warri and Effurun metropolis, providing housing for these workers who were engaged in the construction works of the steel plant.

Between November 1979 and mid 1980, a few of the company's residential houses were tenant-ably ready in permanent camp and camp extension (i.e. Steel Towns II and III respectively), and by November 1981 when the first Arc Furnace was commissioned, the housing complex of DSC (including Steel Town I) was habitable. The housing complex provided accommodation for the large number of staff in three locations, distinct but contiguous. The need to move all staff from the neighbouring towns was rife and the shift system of work was instituted. Quite a good number of the DSC workers were adherents of the Christian Faith, and so the need for religious gathering became inevitable.

2.0 HOW IT BEGAN

The Christians amongst these new settlers in the townships finding it difficult to continue to commute to and from Warri and Effurun for religious activities, decided to come together as a non – denominational lay apostolate church, which was called the Christian Worship Centre (CWC). The CWC then obtained the approval of DSC management for the use of school I Auditorium for her church activities. The worshippers were Christians of different denominations. It is noteworthy that most of the lay-leaders who managed the CWC then were Protestants of the Anglican denomination.

After a while the Anglican Christians in the CWC felt the need for Anglican tradition in their worship and general spiritual activities, and a move toward

this began. Messrs J. A. Okpubuluku, B. O. Enyegoro and S. O. Onojetah circulated an awareness letter calling Anglican Christians to a meeting. Several meetings were held in different locations in 1983, but the most memorable and decisive one was the meeting held at the residence of Mr. P. E. Ozako, who also presided over the meeting (at No. 5 Egiegi Close Steel Town III, i.e. Camp Extension).

A delegation (comprising Messrs P. E. Ozako, J. A. Okpubuluku, B. O. Enyegoro and Dr. A. M. O. Pessu) was sent to the then provost of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Warri, Very Revd. A. W. Bovi, to discuss the founding of an Anglican Church in the new settlement of DSC Towns – the provost was in full support. Preparations and arrangements for the take off of the new church followed. Application was made to the DSC management for permission to use School II auditorium as the place of worship: this was granted. So it was that on the 14th of August 1983, the School II Auditorium was dedicated by Very Revd. A.W Bovi as a place of worship for the Anglican Community of Delta Steel Company, Ltd. His Sermon was taken from Mathew 21:13. Assisting the Provost on that occasion were Revd. Canon J.O Binitie and Revd. Canon M. B. Forae (then Superintendent of Jeremi District of Ughievwen Archdeaconry). The total attendance at the inaugural service was 198 (adult and children) while the total collection was N64.95 (sixty-four naira, ninety five kobo). Some of the key foundation members of the church who were involved in the initial planning and arrangements for the founding of the church included: Mr. Paul E. Ozako, Mr. Jacob Okpubuluku, Dr. Anthony M. O. Pessu, Mr. Vincent U. Okpalauwaekwe of blessed memory, Mr. Benedict I. Okeke, Mr. Solomon O. Ogundare, Mr. Osita C. Aneke, Mr. Benson O. Enyegoro of blessed memory, Mr. Sunday O. Onojetah, Mr. Walter C. Odumodu, Mr. Clement O. Ekpemu, Mr. Sylvester I. Otubelu, Mr. Vincent I. Adiukwu, Dr. Moses Diakparomre, Mr. Paul Eberagwa, Dr. Benson E. Okah-Avae, Mr. Bernard B, Sajini, Mr. D. Enaughe, Mr. Isaac Ulebe, Mr. Vincent Okpakowodo, Mr. Jonah E. Asasah, Mr. Moses Akposibruke, Mr. Christopher Idolor now Revd. Christopher Idolor and Mrs. D. Okpoli.

The women were not left out in the enthusiasm to found the church. Mrs. Ozako was the first to organize and teach the choir. Dr. Mrs. R. E. Pessu, Mrs. C. K. Ekpemu and Miss D. Ononye were in charge organizing the children Sunday school. The new church was later named "All Saints' Anglican Church, DSC", which name received the blessing of the then bishop of Warri Diocese, Rt. Revd. J. O. Dafiewhare, on 24th August 1983.

The first parochial church council (PCC) was elected on 16th October 1983 with Mr. P. E. Ozako as chairman, Mr. J. A. Okpubuluku (Vice chairman), Mr. B. O. Enyegoro (Secretary), Mrs. D. Okpoli (Asst. Sec.), Mr. V. U. Okpalauwaekwe (treasurer/people's warden), Mr. I. B. Okeke (financial secretary). Other members were Dr. A. M. O. Pessu, Dr. A. M. Diakparomre, Mr. S. O. Ogundare, Dr. B. E. Okah-Avae, Mrs. S. B. Assangha of blessed memory, Mr. C. O. Ekpemu, Mr. W. C. O. Odumodu, Mr. S. O. Onojetah.

3.0 GROWTH AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The new church was placed under the supervision of the Superintendent of Jeremi district, though members desired for it to be nurtured from the Cathedral due to the cosmopolitan nature of the DSC community. However, a few years later, due to some difficulties it was experiencing within the Ughievwen Archdeaconry, the church applied and obtained diocesan approval to be constituted into an extraordinary chapelry responsible to the Diocesan and Synod.

The church witnessed rapid spiritual, numerical and physical growth and developments over the years. The congregation grew rapidly and worship space soon became inadequate. The church applied to DSC management for a land space to use as permanent place of worship – this was approved in 1985 and land of about 1.5 hectares was given to the church. Other religious bodies (Roman Catholic, CWC and Moslems) were also given lands. That same year, Church Building committee headed by Dr. B. E. Okah-Avae, was constituted with the mandate to commence the development of the permanent site (the present location). The foundation of the Church Hall (intended to be a multipurpose hall) was laid by Rt. Rev. G. N. Otubelu (then Bishop of Enugu Diocese) on 19th April, 1986. When the building had received its roof cladding, the church later moved from the School auditorium to its permanent site at Abuja Road Steel Town I, on the 4th of August 1991, with a congregation of about 1300 members. The Rt. Rev. J. O. Dafiewhare (then Bishop of Warri) consecrated the building for worship on that day and also instituted All Saints' Church, DSC as an Extra Parochial Chapelry.

From the inception of the church until it moved to the permanent site, the day-to-day administration of the church and organization of various activities were handled mainly by laymen. The first commissioned diocesan layreaders include Mr. P. E. Ozako, Mr. V. U. Okpalauwaekwe, Mr. Benson Enyegoro, Mr. J. A. Okpubuluku, Mr. J. E. Asasah and Mr. Vincent I.

Adiukwu. Mr. J. O. Egbebruke (now J. Y. El-Brukevwe), Mr. Andrew E. Umunadi, Mr. Wilson Oruremu now Revd. Wilson Oruremu and Mr. E. W. Akpololohor were later commissioned Lay-Readers who also boosted the lay ministry of the church. These men, together with Dr. A. M. O. Pessu (already a Lay-reader from Benin Diocese), conducted, preached and taught at services and bible study classes as well as prepared candidates for baptism and confirmation. The last lay chairman of the PCC, Dr. A. M. O. Pessu (now and archdeacon in Warri Diocese) became the first resident chaplain of the chapel after his diaconate ordination in September 1991 - later priested in July 1992. He was a non-stipendiary priest who combined the running of the chapel with his normal schedule as an engineer and Deputy General Manager in Delta Steel Company. The first full time clergyman posted to the chapel was Rev. R. O. Asama who served as a deacon and curate. Rev. Canon S. E. Ogue (now archdeacon) of blessed memory succeeded Rev. Canon Dr. Pessu and he was the first full time chaplain of the chapel. Since inception, 29 clergymen have served in the Chapel over the years, contributing to its growth and development in various dimensions. The chapel is proud of them; especially His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Cyril Odutemu JP, bishop of Ughelli diocese, who was elected bishop while serving as chaplain of the chapel. The list of the clergy who has served (including those serving currently) is shown in table 1 below.

Some other notable developments are mentioned here:

- The church Hall – completed and used for worship, 1991-2013
- Sunday School Classrooms Block – completed in 1992
- Vicarage Complex(1 duplex and two flats) – foundation laid on 7th February 1999 and completed building dedicated on 1st October 2002, all by the Rt. Rev. V. O. Muoghereh JP
- Successful hosting of Ughelli Diocesan Synod in 2003
- Acquired a 3.046 acres of land at Egin in 2005
- Started a Secondary School which took off 11th Sept. 2006. Foundation of the main school block was laid on 7th November 2007 by Rt. Rev. V. O. Muoghereh JP. Phase I – completed and phase II ongoing.
- Perimeter Block Fence – completed
- New Chapel Building – foundation was laid on January 30th 2009 by Rt. Rev. V. O. Muoghereh JP - project is ongoing.
- As part of evangelism and mission work, the chapel has revived and assisted some small churches struggling to survive. In November

2002 it revived the church at Igbojidi through an evangelistic crusade and also bought a land for them; in 2010 the church at Oleri was revived through a crusade along with financial assistance towards buying a land. The chapel founded the Church at Okpaka in October 2005 and bought a land for them.

- Through its spiritual vibrancy and incubation the chapel has produced a number of priests, among whom are: Revd. Canon P. E. Ozako, Ven. Dr. A. M. O. Pessu, Revd. A. A. Adeyemi, Revd. Canon J. E. Okorodudu, Revd. S. O. Ogborhokpa, Revd. S. A. Erediyoma, Revd. L. O. Manuwa, Revd. Innocent Ereridjere and Revd. P. O. Abizor.

Table 1: List of Clergy who have served in the chapel

S/N	NAME OF PRIEST	PERIOD		CAPACITY
		FROM	TO	
1	Revd. Canon M. B Forae	1983	1989	Superintendent
2	Revd. J. A. Oghenekaro	1989	1991	
3	Revd. Canon Dr. A.M.O Pessu	4/8/91	17/3/98	Chaplain
4	Revd. R. O. Asama	Jun 1995	Dec 1996	(Deacon) Curate
5	Revd. G. N. Obenamadu	30/4/97	31/3/98	Curate
6	Revd. Canon S. E. Ogue	1/3/98	June 2004	Chaplain
7.	Revd. M. O. Aruoren	June 2002	June 2004	Curate
8	Revd. L.O Manuwa	June 2002	June 2008	Curate (N.S.)
9.	Revd. P.O. Abizor	Dec 2003	June 2004	Curate
10.	Revd. Canon O.D-Edjere	June 2004	June 2006	Chaplain
11.	Revd. Sunny Ogborhokpa	June 2004	June 2005	Curate
12.	Revd. Freeborn Onokpite	June 2005	Dec 2006	Curate
13.	Revd. Canon R.Y.O. Ayadju	June 2006	Oct 2007	Chaplain
14.	Revd. J. Onakpoma	Dec 2006	July 2007	Curate
15.	Revd. Kennedy Magrimor	June 2007	June 2010	Curate
16.	Revd. Moses Ograh	June 2008	June 2009	Curate
17.	Ven. C.O Odutemu	June 2008	Dec 2010	Chaplain
18.	Revd. Emmanuel Usiaphre	Sept 2009	July 2011	Curate

19.	Revd. Favour O. J. Efetobor	June 2010	July 2011	Curate
20.	Revd. Canon B.A.C Awharitoma	Dec 2010	Aug 2014	Chaplain
21.	Revd. Philip Esemiteye	July 2011	Aug 2014	Curate
22.	Revd. Friday E. Oghighe	July 2011	Jan 2012	Curate
23.	Revd. C.J. Omodanefe	Jan 2012	Dec. 2012	Curate
24.	Revd. D.D. Ogilo (D)	Feb 2012	Aug. 2014	Curate (N.S. Deacon)
25.	Ven. R.O Arhawho	Aug. 2014	Aug. 2016	Chaplain
26.	Revd. A.E. Oghenejobo	Aug. 2014	Dec. 2014	Curate
27.	Rev. E. U. Umuago	Aug. 2014	Aug. 2016	Curate
28.	Ven. Dr. Charles Badawusi	Aug 2014	Aug. 2016	Curate On attachment
29.	Revd. D.O. Okotete	Aug 2015	Aug. 2017	Curate
30.	Ven. R.D. Omodoro	Aug. 2016	Till date	Chaplain
31.	Revd. S.O. Ogu	Aug. 2016	Till date	Curate
32.	Revd. Johnson Akporehwe	Aug. 2017	Dec. 2017	Curate
33.	Revd. Alfred Osiobe	Jan. 2018	Till date	Curate
34.	Revd. Canon F.A.Onokpite	Jan 2021	Till date	Chaplain
35.	Revd. V.B. Umukoro	Jan 2021	Till date	Curate

4.0 **IMPACT AND SETBACKS**

The All Saints' Anglican Chapel, DSC, has been privileged to make some impacts both in its immediate environment of the Delta Steel Company community, the Diocese and the nation in general. The church has not failed in contributing to the development of the diocese of Ughelli since its creation till now (in fact the Chapel has been ranked second in financial contributions in the Diocese for a long time). It also noteworthy that the Chapel has been playing a major role in the Proposed Ughievwen Diocese and has been chosen to be the Cathedral when eventually created by the grace of God. By the grace of God the Chapel is hosting the Ughelli Diocesan Synod for the second time.

The growth and development of the Chapel has not been without difficulties and crises periods. The congregation is well known for its

vibrancy and generosity, which it continues to maintain despite the many setbacks occasioned by trying moments of financial difficulties as a result of many reorganizations and restructuring in the Delta Steel Company. A good number of members have been put out of jobs and are striving to make ends meet. Some of the problems at one time or another have affected the growth and well-being of the church. The prolonged closure of Delta Steel Co. Ltd and consequent cessation of salaries and emoluments including persons, as situation that has persisted over the past decade or so, has made this situation to grow from bad to deplorable.

As if to complicate the financial woes of the chapel, we had been saddled with the task of enlarging our new permanent chapel building to the standard of a Cathedral, a project that should have been embarked upon by an entire diocese. This has placed quite an enormous strain. However, in spite of these, the Lord has continued to sustain His church in ways that can best described as miraculous. May His name be praised!!

5.0 **CONCLUSION**

The story of Delta Steel Co. Ltd as an establishment may not be encouraging in view of the fact that it failed to transform the nation technologically, but the spin-off of that event, as enunciated by the success story of the chapelry, should be an encouragement and challenge to future generations of the church of Nigeria.

Nigerians and Christians in general, should learn that they can live together, worship together and progress together despite cultural and tribal differences.

Compiled by:

Sir Engr. V.U. Okpalauwaekwe & Engr. DR. B.E Okah-Avae

Updated and Edited by:

Ven. R.D. OMODORO, JP.