

**John Reddington** was born on 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1910 in Curragboy Athlone in Ireland. He attended Carrick National School Curragboy from 1916-1924.

Reddington became a member of society of the African Missions (S.M.A) of the Irish province on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1930. He was ordained Priest on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1934. Straight away he came to Nigeria to start his missionary work. He taught at St. Gregory's Lagos from 1934- 1973. He was later made superior of schools in the Western Region of Nigeria. Fr. John Reddington was one time the Vice Provincial Superior of Society of African Missions (1952-1954).

June 29<sup>th</sup> 1954 witnessed the consecration of Fr. John Reddington as the pioneer Bishop of the then Jos Diocese. In his work of shepherding the people of God in the Diocese of Jos, Bishop Reddington proved himself a pastor, a father and an efficient Administrator. One of the SMA Priests who worked with him for some years in Jos described Bishop Reddington as "an austere man, a very good and efficient Administrator, very fatherly and pastoral minded."

One of the striking things about Bishop Reddington was his great feel and love for the local Church. He cared for the spiritual and material wellbeing of the flock entrusted to him. He established good schools for Catholic boys and girls in the diocese of Jos. It was one of his dreams for the Church in Jos diocese to be indigenized in every way. This was what gave rise to his establishment of the Congregation of Our Lady of Fatima Sisters in 1965 to give a generous and spontaneous service to the children of God in simple, cultural and faith filled ways.

Bishop Reddington was a man of prayer, great faith, vision, and simplicity, deep trust in divine providence, adaptability, detachment, determination and courage. This enabled him to effectively handle a lot of administrative difficulties he encountered as a pioneer Bishop of Jos. He retired home to Ireland, in 1974 and peacefully slept in the Lord on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1994. Bishop Reddington was and is still a gift, an inspiration and a challenge to us his daughters (OLF Sisters).

**OUR LADY OF FATIMA SISTERS  
HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION OF  
OUR LADY OF FATIMA SISTERS, JOS, NIGERIA  
1965 - DATE**

**THE FOUNDATION**

"To be self is to have a history", says Professor Bernard W. Anderson. It is this personal history that defines one's uniqueness. This is true of Our Lady of Fatima Sisters Jos, a group of indigenous religious women bound together primarily by our common faith and God-given vocation. Our uniqueness as a group lies not so much in the events we have lived through as a group but God's mysterious choice and formation of us as people with a common sense of Identity, Vocation and Mission.

In the 1960s when Bishop John Reddington, SMA, the then Bishop of Jos Diocese submitted his progress report of the Diocese to the Sacred Congregation for the propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) in Rome, Propaganda Fide was favorably impressed by the number of vocations to the priesthood in the Diocese. Having realized from the report a great need for an indigenous Congregation of religious women for the Diocese, the Sacred Congregation for the propagation of the Faith suggested that Bishop Reddington should consider the establishment of such a Congregation. For Bishop Reddington it was a welcomed proposal as he had been thinking on similar lines with Propaganda Fide. It was as if providence was confirming through Propaganda Fide what he was discerning about for quite some time. After some period of serious prayer and reflection, Bishop Reddington subsequently rose to the challenge and by virtue of Canon 492 (old canon), on 13th January 1965, founded the Congregation of Our Lady of Fatima Sisters, Jos who would give generous and dedicated service to the children of God in the various fields of life, **"BRINGING CHRIST TO THE WORLD AND THE WORLD TO CHRIST" - FATHER FOUNDER**

The Congregation got its decree of canonical erection on the feast of St. Joseph 19th March 1965. With this decree of erection the Congregation became a public juridical person.

**THE BEGINNING**

All plans of starting the Novitiate in Zawan was already completed but with the movement of St. Louis Sisters out of Shendam as a result of the takeover of the Mission hospital by the Government, the Convent there was found with better accommodation for the nucleus of the new Diocesan Congregation.

The hand of providence was with this great stride in Jos Diocese in the selection of Shendam as the Mother House for the first native Sisters for Jos Diocese, just as in 1907 when He chose this same town to be the home of the first Catholic Missionaries - SMA Fathers in Northern Nigeria. Shendam has since then found another historic place in the life of the Church in Northern Nigeria, for the fact that the Congregation of Our Lady of Fatima Sisters is the first indigenous Congregation in Northern Nigeria.

With the permission given to Bishop John Reddington Propaganda Fidei Rome "requested the Our Lady of Apostles Sisters (OLA) of Irish Province to help form the candidates God would send to be formed as Our Lady of Fatima Sisters (OLF). The OLA Sisters responded positively by releasing Sr. Virgilius O'Sullivan (of blessed memory) for this assignment.

On 8th February, 1965 Sr. Virgilius arrived Shendam accompanied by Mother Leo, OLA to begin the formation of the new Congregation. They were welcomed by Sr. Mary Cleophas and Sr. Brendan, Sisters of St Louis (SSL) who left Shendam finally on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1965 for their

convent in Jos. Sr. Virgilius' arrival in Shendam to await the coming of the aspirants she and the Founder were hoping would come in is an important and significant aspect of our beginning. This act of waiting for the aspirants signifies that both Sr. Virgilius and our Father Founder were people of faith. It is on this faith that the Congregation was founded and handed down to us. Sr. Virgilius, the founding Superior was everything to the new Congregation as she took up the roles of Superior, Postulant Mistress, and Teacher etc. February 9th 1965, saw the arrival of first three aspirants; Justina Afamefuna from Jos, Martina Damen and Veronica Daniang from Kwa Parish, in Shendam to begin their Postulancy. Bernadette Nwaigwe from Bisichi arrived on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1965 while Anthonia Dimlong from Pankshin and Cecilia Wutes from Kwalla arrived Shendam 17th March, 1965. All six Aspirants were from Teachers Training College Akwanga, now Our Lady of Apostles College, Akwanga.

The six Aspirants were received as Postulants on 25th March 1965. The ceremony included the vesting of the aspirants in the postulant's outfit, followed by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass celebrated by the Founder at the Parish Church during which he preached a sermon stressing to the people of Jos Diocese the significance of that day which "saw the beginning of a native Sisterhood for Jos Diocese, as he remarked "today these six young girls form the foundation members of the Diocesan Congregation". The journey was however cut short for Cecilia Wutes when her mother arrived the Novitiate on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1965 and demanded that her daughter returned home with her.

The first outing for the Postulants was on 3rd July when they travelled to Jos to attend the priestly ordination of Rev Fr Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka which was scheduled for the next day, 4th July, 1965 at the Cathedral Church of Our Lady of Fatima Jos and his Thanksgiving Mass in Pankshin in company of Sr. Magdalene Cadogan, OLA who had been transferred from Ibadan to Shendam to be the first Novice Mistress. The young community had a great challenge when the founding Superior, Sr Virgilius took ill on 23rd December 1965 and was hospitalized in Jos for four weeks. Sr Francis Regis was then sent to Shendam to be a companion to Sr. Mary Magdalene Cadogan. January 12th 1966 saw the reception of the Postulants into the Novitiate. The ceremony attracted many priests (32 priests concelebrated Mass) OLA and St Louis Sisters from Jos, Zonkwa, Kaduna and a few from other Dioceses. It brought parents and relations of all the novices and their school companions from Teachers' Training College (TTC), Akwanga.

September 27th 1966 saw the beginning of the Nigerian civil war which had a great effect in the lives of the Novices and Postulants. It was indeed a moment of decision making for the formators and the formandees. Justina Afamefuna and Bernadette Nwaigwe (of happy memories) had to leave for the East and joined the OLAs and the Immaculate Heart Sisters respectively. This left the young Congregation with only three of the foundation members.

The three Novices, Martin de Porres Damen, Mary Alphonsus Daniang and Mary Patrick Dimlong having successfully completed their novitiate training, made their first profession of vows on 13th January, 1968 at the Sacred Heart Church, Shendam. It was indeed a historic event and a hallmark in the annals of the OLF Congregation.

The following day, 14th January, the three newly professed Sisters left for Jos to the first Professed OLF Community at Danja Street.

## **GROWTH**

"The year 1967 saw the coming of Theresa Suku and Theresa Long who were both from Kagoro. In 1968, Monica Barau (Sr. Vincent de Paul) of happy memory, Margaret Kudi (Sr Mary Lucy Kudi) Anna Jang and Helen Dakup came in but the last two left as novices. In January 1970, Theresa Suku (Sr Mary Joseph) made her first profession of religious vows and in January 1971 Monica Barau (Sr Vincent de Paul Barau) and Margaret Kudi (Sr Mary Lucy Kudi) made theirs. The first Novice Mistress, Sister Mary Magdalene, "Small Mother" as she was affectionately called to differentiate her from Sr Virgilius O'Sullivan "Big Mother" was called home to Ireland in 1971. Three new candidates from the Eastern part of Nigeria arrived Shendam at the end of the civil war. Sarah Njoku in January 1971, Esther Rose Njoku, Rosanna Nkechi Ukah six months later. To replace Mother Magdalene Cadogan, in 1972, another OLA, Sr Bernadette Flynn was sent to take over the formation of the Postulants.

In January 1972 - Elizabeth Ugwu (Sr Stella Nkem Ugwu) from Akwunanu and Margaret Kinze arrived Shendam to start off their formation. Rosemary Anosieke, Christiana John and Helen Aje all from St Peter Claver's Kafanchan joined them in 1973.

On 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1974 Sarah Njoku made her first profession of Religious Vows while Esther Rose (Sr Clare Njoku) and Rosanna Ukah (Sr Mary Nkechi Ukah) made theirs on 8<sup>th</sup> July of the same year.

The Holy year Celebrations at Benin left a lasting historical land mark with the profession of Sr. Stella Nkem Ugwu along with Sisters of other Congregations on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1974. Sr Bernadette received her vows on behalf of the founding Superior. Sr Mary Patrick and Sr Mary Joseph Suku witnessed the profession in Benin. 6<sup>th</sup> January 1974 was the day the two surviving foundation members happily vowed their lives over to God forever as Our lady of Fatima Sisters of Jos. This opened a new phase of growth and solidity for the Congregation.

The following year, 1975 when Sr. Bernadette left for Ireland Sr. Mary Joseph was sent to stay in the Novitiate and take care of the Postulants. This she did until the former Novice Mistress, Mother Mary Magdalene who had left in 1971 returned in April 1976 after a break of about five years and resumed her formation work with four postulants namely: Caroline Aliboh, Mary Bulus, Josephine Eke and Florence Golam. At this point Mother Virgilius had retired and returned to Ireland in 1976 and Sr. Rosarri O'sullivan, OLA replaced her as Superior for a period of two years - at the end of which the mantle of leadership fell on the pioneer members, Sr. Martin de Porres Damen and Sr. Mary Patrick Dimlong. These handled the mantle of leadership effectively until the first General Chapter in 1985.

Mother Magdalene remained very helpful to the Congregation and advised that the Congregation should start training her own personnel for formation. The first to be trained was Sr Caroline in 1980/81 followed by Sr. Lucy Gidado 1981 - 82 and Sr. Florence Golam, between 1984 and 85 at the Centre for Renewal Jos. All three sisters worked with Sr. MaryMagdalene, OLA at various times in order to gain some formation experience.

After seventeen years of selfless service in formation ministry in the Congregation, in 1986 Sr. Mary Magdalene was transferred to Lagos by her Congregation. She handed over to Sr. Florence Golam who became the first OLF Novice Mistress. This was a courageous step taken by the Congregation to take up the sole responsibility of the formation of its candidates.

## **RETIREMENT AND DEPARTURE OF BISHOP J. REDDINGTON**

After a fulfilled and fruitful missionary life as priest. Bishop and Founder of the OLF Congregation Bishop Reddington put in his resignation which was accepted by Propaganda Fidei Rome in July 1974. The then Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Lagos Fr. Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka was appointed and consecrated as auxiliary Bishop of Jos on 9th September 1973 and was installed Bishop of Jos on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1974.

Bishop Reddington entrusted the OLF Congregation to the care of Bishop Ganaka before his retirement and return to Ireland, his native land in 1974 assuring them with the words "**GABRIEL WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU**". True to our Founder's words, Bishop Ganaka played his fatherly role diligently in the life of the OLF Sisters. He empowered, supported and challenged them to growth until the Lord called him to his eternal reward on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1999. Today the Congregation enjoys the fatherly care and support of the Catholic Archbishop of Jos, Rt. Rev. Dr Matthew Ishaya Audu having taken over from Most Rev Dr Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, the present Archbishop and Metropolitan of Abuja Archdiocese.

Another historic landmark in the life of the congregation was when the OLF Generalate in Tudun Wada Jos was officially opened on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1994 by His Excellency, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, Papal Nuncio to Nigeria. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1994 the Diocese of Jos was raised to the status of an Archdiocese and Bishop Ganaka was installed the first metropolitan Archbishop of Jos. Having seen the Congregation stabilized administratively and the Diocese of Jos raised to a higher status Bishop Reddington sang his "Nunc dimittis" and satisfactorily went home to his eternal reward on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1994.

(Gidado Lucy OLF, Parable of the Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima, NVRI Press, Vom, 2000 P. 14).

Vocations continued to flow into the Congregation slowly but steadily till date. Today we are multi ethnic group with a numerical strength of Eighty Seven professed Sisters (87) working in ten (10) Dioceses (within and outside Nigeria) in diverse Pastoral and Social Ministries of Teaching, Nursing and Socio-Pastoral Development. Armed with our Charism of **GENEROUS AND SPONTANEOUS SERVICE TO THE CHILDREN OF GOD and in our Spirit of FAITH AND SIMPLICITY we strive to BRING CHRIST TO THE WORLD AND THE WORLD TO CHRIST.**

## **GENERAL CHAPTERS**

Chapter is new page in the life of a religious Congregation. And so it was with the OLF Sisters with convocation of the first General Chapter which set the whole Congregation on a remote preparation for the Chapter scheduled for July/August 1985. The years 1983 to 1985 were spent on intense work on Constitution Review by the entire Congregation under the guidance of Sr. Eithne McDevitt, OLA who also moderated the Chapter. Sr. Marciana O'keefe, OLA played a very vital role in getting our Constitutions approved in 1994 as official document to direct our life as a young Congregation.

The OLF Congregation has celebrated 8 General Chapters since its inception in 1965. Each chapter with its unique thrust, mandate and leadership team greatly enhanced and solidified the life of the OLFs in terms of witness, mission, physical and spiritual development and impact on the life of the local and universal Church.

## **LEADERSHIP TEAMS SINCE INCEPTION**

### **1985-1989**

Sr Mary Patrick Dimlong- Superior General  
Sr Stella Nkem Ugwu- Vicar General  
Sr Vincent de Paul Barau- Councillor  
Sr Mary Nkechi Ukah- Councillor

### **1989-1994**

Sr Mary Patrick Dimlong- Superior General  
Sr Martin de Porres Damen- Vicar General  
Sr Florence Golam- Councillor  
Sr Lucy Gidado- Councillor

### **1994-1999**

Sr Martin de Porres Damen- Superior General  
Sr Florence Golam- Vicar General  
Sr Lucy Gidado- Councillor  
Sr Theresa Dung- Councillor

### **1999-2004**

Sr Lucy Gidado- Superior General  
Sr Esther Shebi- Vicar General  
Sr Mary Patrick Dimlong- Councillor  
Sr Josephine Eke- Councillor

### **2004-2009**

Sr Lucy Gidado- Superior General  
Sr Florence Golam- Vicar General  
Sr Esther Shebi- Councillor  
Sr Juliana Bodang- Councillor

### **2009-2014**

Sr Florence Golam- Superior General  
Sr Juliana Bodang- Vicar General  
Sr IreneMary Miaphen- Councillor  
Sr Virginia Shuaibu- Councillor

### **2014-2019**

Sr Florence Golam- Superior General  
Sr Esther Shebi- Vicar General  
Sr IreneMary Miaphen- Councillor

Sr Florence Dunkong- Councillor

**2019-2024**

Sr Theresa Dung- Superior General

Sr Virginia Shuaibu- Vicar General

Sr Cecilia Agule- Councillor and Judicial Vicar

Sr Rhoda Enna- Councillor

Sr Elizabeth Shikyil- Councillor

## **PHYSICAL GROWTH AND EXPANSION**

1968 - OLF CONVENT DANJA STREET, JOS

The OLF Congregation took off in Shendam in 1965 with Shendam as our Mother - house. The pioneer members moved up to Jos on 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1968 to open our first professed Sisters Community in Danja Street for more studies in preparation for the mission.

1979 - OLF COMMUNITY PANKSHIN was opened at a temporary site in GSS Pankshin staff Quarters. In September of the same year the building of the convent at its permanent site was completed. The Sisters moved in on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1980.

1978 -OLF Professed Sisters Community, Shendam

In 1978 a professed Sisters Community was established in Shendam to support the formation

House 1980 - OLF Community, Akwanga 1988 - OLF Novitiate/Convent Kuru

- OLF Community, Sabo Tasha, Kaduna

- OLF Community, Namu

- OLF Community, Louisville Jos

- OLF Community, Kakuri Kaduna

- OLF Community, Independence Way Kaduna

- OLF Community, Wusasa, Zaria

- OLF Community, Gwada

- OLF Community, Karu

- OLF Community, Kano

- OLF Community, Yakoko

- OLF Community, Yola

## **OUR LADY OF FATIMA SISTERS INSTITUTIONS** *Year of Establishment*

Fatima Private School Shendam 1987

Mother Virgilus Memorial Rural Clinic, Namu 1987

Mandela Hospital K/Vom 1991

Fatima Private School, Namu 1995

Fatima Private School Akwanga 1997

Fatima Institute for Liturgical Apostolate 1998

Fatima Altar Bread Bakery 1998

Fatima Pharmacy 1999

Fatima Private School, Karu 2008

Fatima Girls' Secondary School Shendam 2008 - Fatima Nursery/Primary School,

Sabon Tasha Kaduna 2010

Magvin Pharmacy Kaduna 2010

Fatima Secondary School Ogba 2013

Archbishop Ganaka Memorial College, Kwal 2013

Scholasticate/Family Alive Centre, Shaka-Giring 2013

Pax Herbal/Herbal Clinic, Tudun Wada	2013
Reddington Memorial College, Ampang West	2014
Alama Private School, Jos	2014
Our Lady Fatima Sisters Academy, Jabi Abuja	2021

**ARCHDIOCESAN/DIOCESAN APOSTOLATES RUN BY OLF SISTERS:**

Our Lady of Fatima Private School Jos	1971
St. Louis College, Jos	1980
OLA Hospital, Akwanga	1980
Our Lady of Fatima Private School Pankshin	1985
OLA Hospital, Jos	1986
Our Lady of Fatima Girls Sec. Sch. Sabon Tasha Kaduna	1990
Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna	1992
St. Gerard's Hospital Kaduna	2001
St. Theresa Girls College, Jos	2003
St. Martin de Porres Clinic, Zaria	2005
Community Based Care and Support Programme (CBCS)	2005
Fatima Nursery/Primary School Gwada	2007
Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna	2009
Fatima Model Schools, Utako-Abuja	2010
St. Monica Health Centre, Yakoko	2010
Sr. Finbarr Special Education Centre, Yakoko	2010
Catholic Book Centre Jos	
St Theresa Christian Religious Instruction Primary School, Yola	2016

The image of the Congregation can be summed up in St. Luke's Gospel 13:18-21. It began like the kingdom of God. From a tiny mustard seed a shrub is growing. It is growing slowly but steadily and surely because it is anchored on the Father's will and the missionary thrust of our Father Founder, Bishop John Reddington - "**SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD**" (Mtt 6:33).