

Nigeria

The Sisters' first foundation in Nigeria was in Jalingo in 1983. Since then, communities have been established in Yola, Ganye and Jos. As well as formation and education, the Sisters are involved in catechetical and pastoral work. Two Kindergarten schools have now developed into full primary schools under the management of the Sisters in Ganye and Jalingo.

In November 2008 the Sisters celebrated 25 years in Nigeria.

When missionaries first went to Nigeria, they usually established schools for the purpose of evangelisation. A few years after independence, the Nigerian government took over all the mission schools. They allowed schools solely for the purposes of training priests and Quaranic schools for Muslim children. For this reason the diocese of Yola was able to have its own 'secondary school' or minor seminary. When girls wished to enter religious life they were allowed to attend this diocesan school to complete their education.

Agreement was reached with the bishop that some Infant Jesus Sisters would teach in this school in Yola. In the meantime the sisters in Jalingo and Ganye reached out to the youth in local secondary schools and villages. They provided literacy programmes and skills in small centres for women in those areas. From the beginning, all the sisters have been involved in catechetical and pastoral work.

In the late 1980s, the government re-opened the door to the establishment of Christian schools, recognising the quality of the education given by the missionaries. This allowed our sisters to work with the diocese in setting up small kindergarten schools, both in Ganye and Jalingo. With time these have grown into full primary schools under the sisters' management.

In the early 1990s the people in the Jalingo area suffered greatly from ethnic clashes and land disputes, which led to the destruction of property and facilities, including schools and hospitals. As a result many more girls grew up without education, which led to abuse, forced marriages, early pregnancy and exploitation.

During his pastoral visits, the Bishop of Jalingo became aware of the plight of these girls. He had seen the work already being done by the sisters, and having shared his vision with them, they decided to open a larger centre for young women in Jalingo. This is now flourishing, with a two-year programme for about 50 young women from the villages.

From the start, one of the pastoral concerns of the sisters was the plight of prisoners, many of whom were innocent and left without trial for 10 to 12 years in very harsh conditions. Over the years, some sisters visited the prisoners regularly, helping with medical problems, running prayer groups and even working with the prison authorities to provide basic facilities such as water. In some cases, they organised legal teams who fought for justice for these prisoners.

As the number of young Nigerian women called to join the Institute increased, the need was felt for a formation house in Jos. Here they can join other young religious for courses while being involved in mission locally. The sisters are currently running a diocesan Catholic primary school in Jos. They instruct children and adults preparing for the sacraments and foster their spiritual life. They have been involved in setting up a number of small basic Christian communities. They also participate in local support groups for people living with HIV/AIDS, sickle cell anaemia and mental health problems.

The sisters today continue to respond to needs to the best of their ability, working in close collaboration with lay people and with other organisations. Their hope is to grow in numbers and in strength, and to continue to be an effective witness to the presence of God among the people.