



## **POPE FRANCIS APPOINTS NEW BISHOP FOR NNEWI DIOCESE**

Nov 09, 2021

### **ANAMBRA, NIGERIA -**

By Josef Ishu

The Holy Father, Pope Francis has appointed Most. Rev. Jonas Benson Okoye as new bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi in Anambra State.

Before his appointment, Bishop Okoye was the Auxiliary Bishop of Akwa Diocese.

The announcement was made on Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at exactly 12pm by the Bishop of Nnewi Diocese, Most Rev. Hilary Odili Paul Okeke, who will be retiring when he

turns 75 years by January 2022.

The new Bishop will be officially taking over by February 10, 2022.

Bishop Jonas Benson Okoye was born to the family of Mr. Patrick and Mrs Theresa Anazoba Okoye of Amata clan in Adazi-Nnukwu, Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Born in the city of Kaduna on the 25th day of January 1963, Bishop Jonas Benson is the second son and the fifth child in a family of eight children.

He started his primary school education at Ojiako Primary School, Adazi-Nnukwu in 1971. In 1972, he returned to Kaduna to continue his primary school education at the prestigious St. Gregory Primary School.

His inspiration to the vocation of priesthood was aroused in his early years when he was an altar server under Rev. Fr. Miniham at St. Joseph's Catholic Cathedral, Kaduna. He however came back to Ojiako Primary School at Adazi-Nnukwu in order to complete his primary education and secure admission into secondary school in the south eastern part of Nigeria.

Although the young Jonas secured admission into the conventional secondary school and the seminary, he willingly opted for the latter, hence his primary priesthood formation between 1976 and 1977 at St. Paul's Seminary, Ukpokwu.

By 1978, His Lordship Jonas Benson Okoye moved on to All Hallows Seminary, Onitsha after successfully completing one year at St. Paul's Seminary, Ukpokwu. In 1981, he sat for the West African School Certificate Examination. Because of his outstanding performance, he was retained in his Alma Mater the following year to teach the younger seminarians Geography, English Literature and Special Mathematics. He was also appointed the school bursar.

In 1983, Benson's Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. A. K. Obiefuna, the then Bishop of Awka, sent him to Bigard Memorial Seminary, Ikot-Ekpene (now St. Joseph's Major Seminary) to begin his study of philosophy. At the end of his four year philosophy course at Ikot-Ekpene, he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy with honours certified by the Pontifical Urban University, Rome to which the institution was affiliated. Thereafter, he was sent on one year apostolic work to join in the formation of the seminarians at St. John Bosco's Minor Seminary, Isuaniocha. There, he taught Religion, Liturgy, Latin and English Literature. After a creditable one year service in 1988, the purposeful young Jonas Benson was sent to Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu to begin theological studies as the last phase of his journey to the priesthood. He sat for his Bachelor's Degree in the study of Divinity in 1992 and obtained a first class grade with honours.

Bishop Jonas Benson Okoye was ordained a priest in 1992 by His Grace, Archbishop A. K. Obiefuna at St. Andrew's Catholic Church, Adazi-Nnukwu. After his ordination, he was posted to St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Ezinifite as parochial vicar.

A year after, 1993, he was appointed Parish Priest of St. Peter's Catholic Church, Oko where he served for two years. The same 1993, he was appointed Defender of the Bond in Awka Diocesan Ecclesiastical Tribunal which position he held until 1995 when he was sent to the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA) for post-graduate studies in Canon law (1995-1997).

On his return he was appointed the Parish Priest of St. John's Catholic Church, Neni (1997-2002). He was also the Chaplain, Knights of St. Mulumba, Anaocha Sub-Council (1997-2002); Dean, Neni Deanery (2000-2002); and Vice Officialis Awka Diocesan Ecclesiastical Tribunal (1997-2002).

In 2002, Bishop Jonas Benson Okoye was asked to continue his canonical studies at the famous St. Paul University, Ottawa in Canada where he obtained Licentiate Degree in Canon Law (JCL). He then proceeded to Lateran University, Rome (2003-2006) and obtained a Doctorate degree with Summa cum Laude Probatus in Canon Law (JCD).

He also did courses in Canonical Jurisprudence in the Roman Rota (2004-2005). On his return from studies in 2006, Bishop Jonas Benson was appointed the Parish Priest of Immaculate Heart Parish, Ekwulobia (2006-2007); Parish Priest, St. Matthew's Catholic Church, Amawbia (2007-2013) as well as the Dean Amawbia Deanery (2007-2013).

He was the Parish Priest of St. Mary's Catholic Church, Awka and the Dean Awka Deanery II. His Lordship, Dr. Jonas Benson Okoye has been the Judicial Vicar, Catholic Diocese of Awka and a Judge in the Onitsha Inter-Diocesan Ecclesiastical Tribunal from 2007 till his appointment as Bishop. He has also served in various Commissions, both at the National and Diocesan level.

He was a member CBCN Committee on Seminary Formation (2008-2012). Bishop Okoye is a member CBCN Committee on Canon Law (2011-date); Secretary Awka Diocesan Finance Council (2007-date); member Awka Diocesan Presbyterial Council (2007 - date); member Awka Diocesan College of Consultors (2009-date); member Diocesan Examination Board (2007- date).

He was elected the President Canon Law Society of Nigeria in 2009 and was re-elected for a second tenure in 2012. His Lordship is a recipient of many merit awards exemplified in: Henry Dunant Gold Merit Award from Red Cross Society of Nigeria (2009); Clergy Merit Award by St Jude Igbo Speaking Catholic, Archdiocese of Kaduna (2009); Vocational Excellence Award, Rotary Club of Nigeria, Njikoka, Anambra State (2012), etc. Bishop Jonas Benson is committed to the encapsulation of his thoughts, knowledge and learning via reachable publications like pamphlets and books that both provoke questions and soothe the enquiries that perturb the hearts and minds of many. Some of his published works are:

Books Abortion and Euthanasia - The Crime of our Day Equality of Spouses in Can.1135, 1987 A Colloquium of Service, 1997 Can. 1341: Judicial and Pastoral Discretion in the Application of Canonical Penalties, 2002 The Suicide: A Patient or a Sinner? 2006 (In the Light of Canonico-Ecclesiastical Penalty) 2011

Public Lectures Youth and Morality (Magazine, Bigard Memorial Seminary Ikot-Ekpene 1986) The Business Priest in a Busy Ministry: in the Light of Canon 286 (Bigard '92 Set at

Enugu 1998) The Liturgical Season of Lent including the Easter Triduum (Seminar Organized by Awka Diocesan Liturgy and Inculturation Commission (ADLIC), April, 2000) Expectations and Challenges of a Good Leader (Seminar Paper for Neni Deanery Catholic Women Organization, July 2001) Purgatory: What the Church Teaches (Knights of St. Mulumba, Regina Caeli Sub-Council, April 2001) Indissolubility of Catholic Marriage and Making a Happy Home: Our Lady as a Model (National Convention of Confraternity of Christian Mothers' Association at Cana House, Awka, May 2000) Judicial and Pastoral Discretion in Relation to Offences, Persons and Penalties in the Light of Canon 1341 (2010 Annual Conference of Canon Law 'Society of Nigeria) Indulgence - Benefiting from the Treasury of the Church (Youth Magazine, 2010) Pastoral Ministry of the Parish Priest and Parochial Vicar in the Code of Canon law (At Annual Seminar of Uromi Diocesan Priests Feb 2011)

What God has Joined Together; No Man Should Put Asunder (Matt. 19:6): Why Annulment Now? (A Paper Presented at the 2013 Inauguration of the Judicial Year of Abuja Archdiocesan Ecclesiastical Tribunal on the 26th January 2013 at the Cathedral of Twelve Apostles, Wuse). The Decision of Pope Benedict XVI to Resign: Canonico-Ecclesiastical Perspective (Feb. 2013) Most Rev. Dr. Jonas Benson Okoye is driven by a consummate passion to serve humans and God. The primary enabler to this passion of service has



been his dogged commitment to the principle of being truthful to self, being fair to others, recognizing the essence of bold association with respectable authorities and institutions; readiness to make sacrifices that fundamentally improve the lives of people, organizations and institutions. In all these he sees himself as a humble servant of God from whom all good things flow. His firm conviction that it shall be well for the faithful here and hereafter emboldens him to teach decency and enhanced living as collateral instead of limitation on the course to eternity. In the midst of adversity, he sustains joy and hope. Bishop Jonas Benson Okoye enjoys work and more work as he blends the growth of spirituality with expanding and entrenching the frontiers of Catholicism in our land. His hobbies include reading and writing, engaging discourses on the path to eternity; an