**Spotlight on Nigeria—Sr. Jacinta** (PowerPoint accompanies text)

**Witnessing to the Gospel in Northern Nigeria.**

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Introduction.

The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena was founded in 1973 in Gusau, Sokoto Diocese, in the North- west of Nigeria, by the Great Bend Dominican Sisters, one of the Unions now known as the Dominican Sisters of Peace.

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The Congregation was founded to be a Christian presence in the Muslim dominated North of Nigeria and to support the Spiritually, Morally and economically deprived Women, Youth and Children.

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We live out this Mission through our apostolates of Education, Health care, Grass roots Evangelization, Rural Development and Animation, Interfaith Dialogue.

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I chose to focus this sharing on Northern Nigeria for two reasons:

Because that is where we were founded and most of our communities are located there.

A lot what has been happing in Nigeria that has made Nigeria on the daily news ; happens in the North.

The indigenous people of Northern Nigeria are largely agrarian; the Christians among them are a minority. The large numbers of Christians who live in the area are mainly a settler community, coming there because of trade or employment. This does not give them stability in the area.

The climate is harsh; it is very hot in the dry season, often very dusty as well. The desert encroachment is evident in the area. The duration of the rainy season in this part of the country is generally short thus the local people are basically poor. The health status of the people, especially of the women, is rated as very poor. Educationally also, the people of the area are the most backward in comparison with other parts of the country with illiteracy level rated as 75%.

The leadership both political and traditional in Northern Nigeria are mostly in the hands of Muslims many of whom are fanatic and often impose policies which are oppressive of people of the other religions an example is the imposition of the Islamic sharia law by most Governors of the states of the Northern which led to violence that claimed the lives of thousands of people.

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Over a decade ago, the Country particularly the North east has been under attack by an Islamic terrorist group known as *Boko Haram*. Boko haram literally means ‘*western education is bad’*. This group which says it has allegiance to ISIS has sustained terrorist attacks in different parts of the North, destroying several villages, killing people and kidnapping others and holding them hostage in the forest.

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These attacks which were initially targeted at Christian communities leading to wipe off of families and villages, burning down homes, bombing of churches, Rectories Convents, seminaries and schools, later spread to attacks on Mosques, market places, bus stations and other wherever there large gatherings people. Suicide bombing is among their commonest modes of attack. It is estimated that in the North East alone over 250, 000 people have been killed in the terrorist attacks of Boko haram.

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Many of you must have heard of kidnap of the two hundred and forty-nine girls from a school in Chibok (Chibok Girls) on April, 2014. These girls were between the age range of 11 and 16. By the time about 110 of them were released three years later, some of them had either one or two children. It was evident that the girls were thoroughly sexually assaulted by the boko haram insurgents. Fives later, we are stilll awaiting the release of the remaining girls. They not only have killed civilians but have also attacked Police stations and army Barracks and killed hundreds of Police men and Nigerian Soldiers as they are said to be operating with more sophisticated weapons than the Nigerian Soldiers and Police

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A recent attack on April 30, 2019 on village Kuda-Kaya, in the North east, an eye witness report said the terrorists “*went from house to house , and many people could not escape because the shooting was sustained for several hours and it came from every direction”*

Another terrorist group operating in Nigeria is the Fulani Herdsmen also referred to as Fulani militia. The Fulani herdsmen are semi-nomads who grazed cows openly.

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This militia group are known to destroy farms by grazing their cows on them. Usually very armed, they kill anyone who dares challenge them for grazing their cows on the farms. Before 2015, they were to a great extent under the control of security forces. But since the incumbent President of Nigeria who is of Fulani origin took over office in 2015, they have gone on rampage, destroying farms, attacking, killing, raping and kidnapping people. No one arrests them.

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Their terrorist activities began in the North central part of the Country in 2015 but at this time they terrorizing different parts of the country mostly in the North West, North Est and the North central where they began. Traveling by road has become so unsafe in Nigeria because they attack motorists, kidnap and demand huge sums of money for ransom before they release their victims. Sometimes even when families pay the ransom, they still kill the victim.

Some other groups who engage in terrorist attacks have been identified in different parts of the Northern Nigeria and are often addressed as *armed bandits.* It is well known that these different terrorist groups are all Islamic extremists projecting adherence to the tenets of Islam and Jihad as reason for their activities. Their main targets are Christian communities, and gatherings of Christians.

Political violence. Our politicians take to violence to get into positions. The ruling party has failed her citizens in terms providing security and bettering the economy. Nigerians had anticipated that the General elections of February/March of this year would have been a good opportunity to vote and usher in a new Government, but behold, the elections were massively rigged, and several lives were lost in the violence that marred the Gen. Elections of this. The Fulani man put himself back to the seat of the presidency and the situations have got worse since the end of the elections.

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**Some of the consequences of the violence**

* Insecurity and tension
* Destruction of agricultural sector
* High rate of poverty
* High rate of crime e.g sexual abuse of girls and women in IPD camps
* High rate of migration from the rural villages.
* High rate of School drop out

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Our response to the Challenge.

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* Protest march

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* Programs on interfaith dialogue at grass roots level, in schools etc
* Organize programs that bring Christian and Muslim women together to dialogue and pray.

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* We identify with the Internally Displaced persons

Embracing more challenges in the northern Nigeria: **Educate the Girl Child**

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We also involved in the providing education in rural areas where the people are marginalized because they chose to be Christians.

One of such projects is a school in which was started specifically to meet the educated the rural girl child who do not have access to education just because they are Girls. They are usually given out in marriage between the age of 11 and 14 very often for economic reasons. We carry out campaign against the Girl child marriage by conscientising the parents on the need to educate their Girl child. The Campaign yielded good fruits as many Parents began send their children to school. Such schools are usually very subsidized as many of the people are too poor to pay for education we were at the verge of closing down the school due to funding when I came to DSI 2016 and during one of our breaks I got conversing with Sr. Sara who took interest in this project and not only had her congregation contribute to keep them in school but contacted some other c Dominican congregations who donated to pay tuition, feeding and construction of classrooms for the school. We remain grateful to them

**Good news.**

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In spite of these challenges, God has continued to send courageous young women Dominican Congregation in Northern Nigeria. We continue to carry the light of the Gospel with courage.

Slide 21 we celebrate, move on with audacity and Courage.

**Gratitude**

IC, DSI

Permit me to mention our Partner Congregations. DSOP, Grand Rapids, Bethany, Neerbosch.

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