



I am Rev. Martin Ifeanyi Onuoha, a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Ahiara, in Imo State, Nigeria. I was born on the 17th of July 1973, the third of only nine children. My ordination to the priesthood was on the 4th of August 2001, after receiving a degree in Philosophy (1996) and Theology (2001) from the *Pontifical Urban University Rome* (through *Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu, Nigeria*), and a Higher National Diploma in Mass Communication from *Enugu State University of Science and Technology*. I served in my home diocese as assistant parish priest for three years, and parish priest for two years, before being sent for further studies in Theology at the *Pontifical University of the Holy Cross Rome, Italy*.

After my master's degree, I served for a short time in a parish in New York, as my bishop in Nigeria preferred that, if I pursued a doctorate degree, it should be in a parish setting so as not to turn out an abstract theologian, out of touch with pastoral realities. He was willing to have me do some mission work after my studies, since priests are not in short supply in the diocese. We have about 500 indigenous priests (Diocesan and Religious) working in different parts of the world - my diocese is often called the *Ireland of Africa*.

It was during my time in New York that I encountered an English priest who relayed to me the great need for priests in this country, for which some dioceses were closing, and in some cases selling churches. It was such a shock to me, coming from a country where the Church is still young (just about 100 years old) and vibrant, with many new parishes and dioceses being created, and magnificent churches rising. I had just fundraised and supervised the building of a presbytery and new Church before leaving my country. The question put to me was, 'why would you prefer to serve in the US, in a parish with six priests, while there are parishes without a single priest elsewhere?' I prayed about this and had a chat with my bishop, who himself studied in England. He was agreeable to a move to England. I told my English friend to contact the diocese and, if they wanted me, I would willingly come. They did and here I am!

There was indeed work to be done. I arrived in November 2008, served first as assistant parish priest in St Joseph's Birkenhead, as a supply priest in eight parishes around the diocese, as assistant parish priest in the parishes of St Werburgh and St Clare in Chester, before being asked by Bishop Mark, in 2011, to take charge of St. Clare's parish, Chester, where I have been till date. Within these years, I have been invited to lead Days of Renewal for the Charismatics and Retreats for different groups in this diocese and neighbouring dioceses. I also teach theology at Maryvale Institute in Birmingham, since completing my doctoral research in 2013.

It has been sometimes challenging, but an amazing experience altogether. I have met very lovely people and made many good friends. I am gradually getting used to life in England - not predicting/trusting the weather, fish and chips and fish pie (my favourite). I am glad to be here to serve the parish and the diocese in the best way I can. God bless.