



By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

Catholic parishes in the area learned first-hand about their church's mission efforts in foreign lands.

Rev. Felix Ilesanmi Osasona, a Nigerian priest, spent a week in Imperial recently to tell churches in Indianola, Imperial, Grant and Wallace about the church's missionary efforts in Africa.

Osasona was born in Nigeria, the second of seven children. He said he was blessed to have parents who were educated themselves and took the education of their children very seriously. His dad was a teacher and his mother ran her own business, buying and selling at the local market.

Today, Nigeria has a law that every child must attend school. However, there is no accountability to insure that happens.

Osasona served in the country's National Youth Service Corp for two years and after earning a degree in chemistry, he taught for one year.

He said his year of teaching prepared him for his work as a missionary.

For nine years, Osasona attended a seminary founded by the Ministry Society of St. Paul. The ministry was founded in Nigeria in 1977.

Their purpose is to go out and preach the good news, evangelize and make Christ and the Catholic Church known to the world.

They seek to improve the lives of people in Africa, working specifically in the countries of Nigeria, Liberia, Botswana, Solfia, Malawi, Sudan, Chad and Gambia.

He said a high poverty level exists in the African countries, making life very hard.

In addition, some countries, such as Malawi, have been decimated by AIDS. He said it's not uncommon for a child to have lost both parents to AIDS and to be suffering from the disease themselves.

In Malawi, the Ministry of St. Paul opened its own orphanage to provide food, shelter and schooling for more than 2,000 kids.

Violence and unrest seem to be commonplace in African countries.

In Sudan, people have faced genocide, creating a mass exodus of refugees.

There, they work to create new communities of churches. Sometimes the walk between the churches can be as much as five hours.

Liberia was marked by war in the 1990s.

In Nigeria, Osasona said fanatical Muslims have unleashed killings in their fight against Western values.

Nigeria's population is 140 million with 250 different languages spoken.

Since 1950, the primary income for Nigeria comes from the sale of oil.

After seminary, he spent a year in another part of the country to help bring the word of God to the people.

In 2003, Osasona became a campus chaplain at the University of Florida.

During his four years there, he finished his master's degree in educational leadership.

Presently, he's working in St. Paul's mission development office in Houston, Texas.

One of his primary roles is to visit parishes and make friends for St. Paul's and seek funds to continue their work in Africa and other parts of the world.

When he returns to Africa, he hopes to put his degree to work as an administrator in a school.