

MY VOCATION STORY



I grew up in a military barracks in Lagos, Nigeria because when I was born my father was in the Nigerian Army. I went to primary and secondary school in Ikeja Cantonment (the name of the barracks) and was an active member of the Legion of Mary and the Altar Girls parish group. We had weekly meetings and visited families and hospitals to pray with the people of God as part of our works of charity.

When the Daughters of St Paul visited my parish for a book display, I was amazed at the wide assortment of book titles I had never seen before. Our parish priest asked some of the altar girls to assist the Sisters during their book sale and we gladly did this. After the last Mass, we had time to ask the nuns a few questions about their Congregation and we were invited to visit them at their convent. We looked forward to the moment with great excitement!

Deep within me, I felt God was calling me to a different kind of life from that of my par-



City of Lagos

ents (married life) but I kept my feelings to myself. The first Sunday we visited the DSP convent in Orile, we noticed that the Sisters had very few things. Some of them gave us their chairs and sat on the floor. I was moved by their simplicity and warm welcome.

My friends and I (all altar girls) went to visit the Daughters of St. Paul a few more times. We spent many periods of sharing and Eucharistic adoration with them. These special moments helped me to feel at home with the Sisters and they also helped me make a better discernment concerning the religious life. At the end of my discernment, I asked to enter their Institute. I told them that I wanted to join their Congregation after I finished secondary school at the age of 16, but they advised me to wait until I turned 18.



I continued to keep in touch with the Sisters and one day they invited me to participate in their *Come and See Program*, which lasted from March to July 1997. Afterward, I was accepted into the DSP pre-postulancy program and was sent to Nairobi, Kenya in October of that same year to begin my initial formation.

I had an enriching formation journey with my companions that lasted from pre-postulancy to novitiate. At the end of our novitiate, I prayed and asked our formator (Sr. Mary-Ann Kochakadan) if I could be allowed to make my first profession in Lagos, especially in view of vocation promotion, while the other members of my group prepared to make their first professions in Nairobi. Thankfully, the Delegation Government granted my request and I was given the joy of being the first Nigerian to make her first vows in the community of Lagos. It was a simple but happy and memorable day for all of us: me, the small DSP community, the aspirants and my family and friends.

Sharing Our Stories

As a temporary professed Sister, I was sent to the community of Lusaka, Zambia where I remained for three years before commencing my studies in Theology at Tangaza College, Nairobi. Prior to that, I had lived 3 months of apostolic experience as a postulant in the Nairobi community and 3 months in Kampala, Uganda. After my preparation for final vows (the preparation course was held in Italy), followed by my perpetual profession in 2010, I was assigned to the community of Abuja, Nigeria, where I lived and worked for twelve years. I carried out the apostolates of vocation promotion, propaganda and also served as community bursar. Our Editorial Office in Nigeria was established in February 2013 and I have worked in that department up until now. We moved our offices to our new apostolic house in Ogba (Lagos) in January 2023.

I was the first Nigerian vocation to enter our Congregation after the Lagos community, which had been closed in 1973, was reopened in 1994, and I look back on my years there with much joy and gratitude. I thank



God for all the DSP missionaries who have lived and worked in our midst, some of whom are now interceding for us from heaven. The seeds sown through their prayers, generosity, commitment and hard work have indeed borne good fruit. God fostered our growth in Nigeria and we developed from just one community to the point that we are now the DSP West Africa Delegation. May God be eternally praised for this great grace!

I thank the Lord every day for calling me to be a Daughter of St Paul. I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to say yes to him through the Pauline life, despite my weaknesses, the many challenges I face each day, and the fatigue of the apostolate. As a little girl growing up in a military barracks, I could never have imagined what God had in store for me, but I'm very glad that he is still leading me along his paths. Indeed, God's ways and thoughts are not ours, but his plans are always the best for us!

Oluwakemi Matilda Akinleye, FSP