

**ADDRESS TO MANAGERS OF SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS AND OTHER
ESTABLISHMENTS GIVEN AT THE BISHOP'S CONFERENCE HALL
EKWULOBIA ON AUGUST 11, 2020**

THE GRACE OF A NEW BEGINNING

It is with joy that I welcome you all to this meeting. I am aware that many of you are wondering why you haven't been invited together to this meeting in spite of the wide difference in your tasks. My reason will help set the stage for what I want us to do in the short time we have for this meeting.

I invited you because although you are involved in the fields of education (schools) health (hospitals), production (Agriculture) and services (banking and, oil and gas), you are involved in the apostolate of the Church. Like the apostles, you have been sent to bear witness in these sectors. Other people are in these sectors but as Church our engagement must bear the marks of who we are: those called by God to be bearers of the Good News of salvation. Thus, our engagement as Church in these activities must mirror the best conceivable practice. Our vision must therefore be beyond profit-making without sacrificing sustainability. Indeed, conformity to best practice in most cases ensures sustainability and profitability.

In the light of the above, it becomes clear that this meeting can be seen as an evaluation, brainstorming and information-gathering session. The erection of Ekwulobia Diocese has given us a rare privilege. God has given us **the grace of a new beginning**, as the theme of this short speech reads. I want us to harness this opportunity not simply for Ekwulobia Diocese but for the Church in Igboland and beyond. This is because whatever we get right here; whatever policy innovation or improvement in practice we are able to make, thanks to this grace of a new beginning, will surely diffuse to other dioceses. This is how cultures and peoples grow. So, I invite you to put yourselves in the service of this bigger objective that God in his providence has thrust upon us.

Most of you gathered here have incredible wealth of experience in the outlined sectors. You have either been managers of such establishments or you are currently on the job. The major consideration is experience; and experience is invaluable. There are things which are not learnt from books but from experience built up over the years through trial and error. Individuals are repositories of such experiences and these deposits are unlocked through conversation and exchange. That is what we are trying to do today. As the Bishop saddled with the task of overseeing the harnessing

of the opportunity given us by the new beginning, I have come with the curia to learn from you about the challenges you have encountered or are encountering in your areas of apostolate; how you have been grappling with these; what you have found to have worked and dead-ends; and how best to respond to such or similar challenges. I want to know about your visions for your establishments; what you have done towards the realization of such visions; how the Bishop or the chancery can interface with you for the realization of such laudable dreams and visions. Above all, I am interested in the evaluation of the everyday practices in these different areas of apostolate with a view towards improving on them. There is always room for improvement. Unfortunately, as a people we do not set store on innovation and on improvement. The *ete na ugbu, ogo na mma* used by our fore-fathers to climb palm trees and to cultivate the land are still in use. One day, a Chinese or whoever may come up with something efficient and affordable for these operations. Then we will gladly switch over to them, become dependent on the new technology without learning the basic principle from which they arise: focus on innovation and efficiency which gives rise to constant evaluation, exchange and creativity.

The above is an aside. I just want to underline the fact that we need to always focus on improvement. This is achieved by periodically reviewing or evaluating whatever we are doing, being open to other insights and going out of our way to solicit feedback from others even from those who are not in our field of endeavor and those who have alternative views of how to do the same thing. Conversation and networking are indispensable tools for growth and improvement. As Church with a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized, we have a duty to preach the Good News to our people and to contribute to the improvement of their lives. The sectors you work in are critical for this improvement – education, health, production and services. I have invited you for a conversation and for networking with one another. The ideas, dreams and visions freely shared here will help all of us to position Ekwulobia Diocese and her apostolates to become more effective channels of grace to our people.

Once more, thank you for honoring the invitation and I pray St. Joseph the patron saint of workers and the spouse of our Blessed Mother to obtain for us the grace of a fruitful deliberation.



+ Peter Ebere Okpaleke
Bishop of Ekwulobia