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Music Ministry and Spiritan Charism: A Beat from Spiritan Sounds Outreach

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MUSIC MINISTRY AND SPIRITAN CHARISM: A BEAT FROM SPIRITAN SOUNDS OUTREACH

INTRODUCTION

Human life can only be meaningful the moment it becomes impactful. Just like other humanity-oriented organizations, 'Spiritans Sound Outreach' takes on similar attributes as much as the rest. The latter's making would be utterly incomplete without delving, albeit briefly, into my antecedents. My personal and unique experience in the Spiritan way of life was accentuated by the boost I got from my parish priest, Rev. Fr Anthony Oparah CSSp. He was my parish priest back then in the year 2000. While I was contemplating becoming a priest, my family advised me to join the diocese as that would "keep me within reach." Fr Anthony however, planted a seed of curiosity in my subconsciousness regarding joining the Spiritans. He said and I quote, "Femi, go! Don't mind the distance. I know you love adventure." I began to wonder what exactly gave him that idea. I had never travelled far from home previously nor attempted any feat that could have won me such an accolade. However, those words rang incessantly in my subconscious all through my seminary days. That statement kept me on my toes whenever I faced challenges. "I know you love adventure. You can do it. You can face it." These words kept resonating and became a source of motivation for me.

'Spiritans Sound Outreach' is simply an answer to a call to enunciate inert potentials in people. Upon joining the congregation of the Holy Spirit where my talents were unleashed and having met people from all walks of life, I made it a point of duty to help other individuals realize their abilities. Hence, the story of 'Spiritans Sound Outreach' is centered around a life scripted and born out of grace.

I grew up as a quiet young man, an introvert you could say, who presently has only succeeded in refining his temperament by virtue of his profession which requires addressing the public. This reserved nature of mine almost prevented me from exploring my abilities, despite harboring the perception that the future would be auspicious. As a young mass server, I had the enthusiasm to sing but never made moves to join the choir until

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much later when I got enrolled in the seminary, where everyone was an automatic member of the choir. Incidentally, I was appointed a choir master both in philosophy and in theology.

However, nurturing personal talents in the seminary with its rigorous academic schedule is often considered a case of personal choice requiring sacrifice. I had by then already begun composing melodies. My first song was in my *Igbo* language, titled “*Ihunanya*”.

It is a communion hymn.

*Oh Ihunanya di aso
Oh Ihunanya di ocha
Nke jesu, biri nime m
Oh Holy Love
Oh pure Love of Jesus fill me.*

This song found its way into the *Spiritans School of Philosophy hymn book* at Isieniu, Nsukka, Nigeria. So, I was motivated to compose other songs. As a choir master in the School of Philosophy, I thereafter charged fellow scholastics to compose the *Magnificat* in various tongues: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Idoma, Tiv and Twi. My personal compositions were in Hausa, Efik and Twi (Ghana). My Hausa version of the *Magnificat*, *Ruhu Nakuwa* was later released with my first music album titled, *I Will Extol* in 2015. I wish to state categorically at this point that I am not a musician *per se*. Rather, I am a lover and composer of music, a singer and a mentor for those who also have a soft spot for singing. I am not conversant with most musical instruments, except for the drums which I can beat to a certain extent.

THE BIRTH OF SPIRITANS SOUND OUTREACH

The emergence of Spiritans Sound Outreach was occasioned by the hurdles I faced while producing my first album. I had spent more money than usual, and I equally had to work with three producers prior to finishing the project. Ruminating on the stress I went through made me vow that my next album must be in my own studio, which would also be dedicated to helping talented singers with no means of exploring their talent, thus, the inauguration of the outreach on December 1, 2018. My vision for outreach transcends the realm of music. It aims to expose gifted youths to the world, all to the glory of God. Spiritans Sound Outreach is threefold: music

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The organizational objectives focus on educating and entertaining society based on the foundation of God's word. This is done via music and writing utilizing the social media in reaching out to people. The constituents of our ministration come in various forms which comprise songs, reflections, homilies, interviews, and drama. Moreover, as a platform for human emancipation, we encourage and develop raw talent in music and writing. Nonetheless, other areas of human endeavor are not relegated to the background. Although, presently, our activities are hugely centered around music, efforts are underway to give keen attention to all other aspects of life, especially in the arts.

KEY PLAYERS

Some of the friends I made in my journey as a priest, a handful of whom are members of the religious and clergy, are prominent benefactors of the outreach. These and other members of the lay faithful spread across the various parishes where I had worked since I was ordained a priest – Corpus Christi Catholic Church, Amassoma, Bayelsa, State; SS Mulumba and David, Lawanson, Surulere, Lagos; SS Joachim and Anne, Meiran, Lagos; and St. Joseph Catholic Church, Ketu-Ijanikin, Lagos – have given concrete support and are part of the ministry. Among these groups and persons are a bunch of spirited people who have given me the much needed push as I sojourn and strive to keep abreast of the mission of the outreach.

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I embarked on my first musical album journey in 2011, shortly after my ordination when I was an assistant parish priest to Fr Vincent Nnatuanya CSSp at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, Amasoma, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. My first band members then were the Catholic students at Niger Delta University. It also featured Jude Ikpaikpai, a seminarian on apostolic work experience at the parish, and who is now a priest. They were part of the album *I will Extol* from the onset. This particular project was completed in 2015 at SS Joachim and Anne Catholic Church, Meiran, where I had worked as an associate parish priest between 2012 and 2017, under the tutelage of Monsignor Livinus Ukah and Fr Stephen Enearu. There, I engaged the youths who actively participated in the launch of the first album. This interaction with those youths gave rise to the inception of their drama troupe, 'Lumen Christi drama group' and the premier edition of their magazine *Trestle*.

My transfer to St Joseph Catholic Church, Ketu-Ijanikin, Lagos in 2017, opened a vista of growth for the emergence of the outreach. Posted as the priest-in-charge, I had an expansive opportunity to explore

the singing ministry further. Our first musical studio was opened at St Joseph's, under the auspices of the duo, Adako Kunle (Jentu Piez) and John Ibhafidon (Jaystone Gold) as producers and a disc jockey by the name Dj. Clinton who organized our program. The release of my album *Iri Orun*, "Heavenly Dew", and another album, *No Limitation*, in 2018, marked the official kick-off for Spiritans Sound Outreach studio's operations. I ensured that the nine young people who took part in the songs composed the lyrics themselves. My third album, *I Lift up my Voice*, was released in 2021 and was launched during our 'Treasures Unveiled' program. I still have other single tracks to my credit some of which are available on our website.

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The studio made it possible to tap into individuals with musical talents in the parish and beyond. Both young and old were engaged vis-a-vis music, either as individuals or as a group, and some of them were given the privilege and opportunity to produce their first track free of charge in our studio. My ministry to young people has been packed with lots of exhilarating experiences. At one point, I wrote a play "Arrested for Service, the conversion of St Paul", published and dramatized by a youth group at an archdiocesan competition. More often than not, I do co-opt the youth into my musical performances, especially at parish events and on feast days.

I produced and performed the song *Mama Mary* with the St Joseph's branch of the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) on the Mother's Day celebration in 2020. More so, I was featured in the song *Baba Joe* composed by Sylvanus Ekeh and performed by the Catholic Men Organization on Father's Day in that same year. The youth were motivated to join me in various drama activities and in some of my outings which included presentations at the annual Christmas get-together of the Lagos Catholic Archdiocesan Priests and Religious.

Interestingly, our presentations at the archdiocesan events have really attracted the attention of the members of the religious and the clergy. It has as well earned us the approval of His Grace, Most Rev Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins, the archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Lagos. He granted us a brief interview at the get-together of 2021, and expressed his admiration for what we do.

SPIRITANS SOUND AND TALENT DISCOVERY: PREMIER EDITION OF TREASURES UNVEILED (2021)

The sole aim of this initiative is to discover and harness raw music talents and to promote gospel music geared towards encouraging people to develop an attitude of praise to God. The organization is attuned

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to the creative nature of God, helping other people to grow, when it walks in this path. Furthermore, it's not out of place to say then, that God created everyone with unique abilities for His service and that of all humankind. But at times, we are not aware of the attributes we possess until we run into life's difficulties. These struggles help turn us back to God as we recognize that He is everything we have got to rely on. The American author and motivational speaker Leo Buscaglia put it well, "Your special talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it, is your gift back to God."

St. Paul in Ephesians 4:12 stressed, "Christ gave these gifts to prepare God's holy people for the work of serving, to make the body of Christ stronger." If that be so, then, why are these gifts, talents or abilities hidden or not put to proper use? It was on this basis that the gospel art show, Treasure Unveiled 2021 was birthed, with the main purpose of showing the world of talent Spiritans Sound Outreach had discovered and helped to foster.

SPIRITANS SOUND MUSICAL SHOW

Treasures Unveiled 2021 had its maiden edition on July 17 2021 at the Ultimate Hall, Iyana Isashi, along Lagos-Badagry Expressway, Lagos, Nigeria. It was a well-attended function with more than three hundred guests including the religious, gospel artistes and a host of other dignitaries gracing the event. A crop of upcoming gospel artistes displayed demonstrations that drew the admiration of the audience, and the entertainer, MC Mayor delighted the crowd with his comic performance. On display that day, were many artistes with new songs and the titles of their songs produced at the Spiritans Sound Studio and they are available on www.spiritanssound.com/ or *YouTube*: Fr Oluwafemi Victor Orilua CSSp.

Interestingly, one of the most memorable highlights of the event featured a drama titled *The Price*. This was performed by some members of the outreach, and it was centered on the importance of choosing the right path in life as every career choice comes with its own price tag (positive or negative). In a bid to appreciate some of the new artistes, awards were presented to the duo of Mr. Jude Nwoye, of Hosanna Praise Music Band and Helen Igwe; one of the fastest rising gospel artistes and music composers around.

On the list of creative people, we have discovered is Chibueze Jude Ekwomadu, a fourteen-year-old boy whose specialty is a kind of paper craft called Origami. He has a series of models to his credit and posted on his social media handles. Another artist, Anthony

Adedayo Ogidi has a peculiar and spectacular way of twisting his lips, using them to effortlessly produce a saxophone-like sound. Omotolani Akintayo is another talented artist we have in our hall of fame. She is ten years old with a set of beautiful drawings in her collection. One of those who has equally had a stint with Spiritans Sound Outreach is Judith Onyinyechi Achuonye. She is a young writer and a potential book publisher who often makes customized notebooks for her classmates in school. On the inauguration of Spiritans Sound Outreach, the organisation gave a heroic award to Akachukwu Francis Ezeh. This young man helped rescue his younger brother who was only three years of age (as at the time this incident took place) from a deep well when he was only nine years old. In essence, like a midwife who helps birth babies, the outreach highlights the heroism in people through a myriad of talent discovery programs.

The goal to encourage writing and have it published has become one of our top priorities.

SPIRITANS SOUND PUBLICATIONS

Spiritans Sound scouts for talent in writing as much as in musical performance. This is not primarily a commercial enterprise. Rather, this talent spotting exercise hopes to uncover and encourage gifted writers, especially those starting out, to bring them into the limelight both on and offline. The goal to encourage writing and have it published has become one of our top priorities. Under the auspices of Spiritans Sound Publications, we have published four books in hard copy written by Fr Oluwafemi Victor Orilua, CSSp which include *The Passover*, a 14-day prayer book for personal deliverance. *Arrested for Service: The conversion of St. Paul*, is a drama performed by the Missionary Childhood Association of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Ketu-Ijanikin, Lagos, Nigeria. *Make Hay* (already on Amazon) and *My Daily Conversation with Jesus* are all publications of Spiritans Sound Publications. *My Daily Conversation with Jesus* is a prayer booklet for children. It was published and distributed for free to children. About 9,000 copies have been distributed already.

Spiritans Sound Outreach recently embarked on the production of a magazine entitled, *The Treasures Unveiler*. The maiden edition was in December 2022 with the theme, “Self-Discovery and Actualization”. The magazine will be published in hard copy and digitally (online). It is a diary and embodiment of laudable feats to impact on society. Self-discovery is necessary if we are to actualize our life’s goal. The fulfilment of our being only becomes possible when we find ourselves in the midst of selfless tools of positive change eager to bring out the best in us. Spiritans Sound Outreach seeks to

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assume such a role in society. *The Treasures Unveiler* launches the outreach into book publishing. Other publishing activities will commence in earnest especially with titles from the outreach's membership, *The Christians that we are* and *Five Pathways to Success: Living the Christian Way*, written by Mr. Martin Eichie and Vivian Ohaeri, respectively.

SPIRITANS SOUND DIGITAL MEDIA

The organization ensures it makes its activities available online through its social media handles:

- YouTube: Spiritans Sound Outreach TV/Fr Oluwafemi Victor Orilua CSSp
- Website: www.spiritanssound.com
- Instagram: *spiritansoundoutreach*
- Facebook Page: *Spiritans Sound Outreach*
- Facebook group: Spiritans Sound Music World.

SPIRITANS SOUND DRAMA

The organization utilizes drama, whether live or staged or recorded for television broadcast or aired on the internet, for educating society. We do this to achieve two goals; preaching morals, and promoting those we know possess acting skills. At the debut of Treasures Unveiled 2021, our drama team performed *The Price*. This ministry will hold a prominent place as time unfolds. As a technique for preaching the gospel and engaging youth, I ventured into making short drama videos and uploaded on YouTube. Through this format, I have discovered young talented people gifted in acting.

THE SPIRITAN CHARISM AND SINGING MINISTRY

The charisms of our founders, Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann, and fidelity to our tradition urge us to respond creatively to the needs of evangelization of our time.¹

The initiative that gave birth to Spiritans Sound Outreach re-echoes the theme of our general chapter, "Behold I am doing something new." (Isaiah 43:19). The music ministry and a specialized niche for the discovery of talent is an added advantage to the discharge of our missionary mandate. It is part of youth ministry which

1. *Spiritans Rule of Life*, 2.

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Spiritans Sound Outreach is coming to the fore at a time when the congregation is wholly conscious of the new wave of the Spirit. The 2021 Bagamoyo chapter laid a strong emphasis on youth ministry. This renewed awareness in this special ministry sits well with Spiritans Sound Outreach. We live in a world where we are faced with the question of how best to capture the attention of the youth in an era of social media frenzy. Music becomes a sure way to transfix the hearts of our teeming youths who have taken to the entertainment world. An editorial of *Treasures Unveiler* describes this era,

The world is gliding away from conventional professions and careers, where jobs previously thought to be downgrading, are gradually beginning to take the shine off the ones considered to be more relevant and lucrative. This is the more reason we get to see the entertainment industry nearly taking the centre stage of world economies presently. Statistics shows that in 2021, the US recorded music industry generated \$14.99 billion USD (United States of America Dollars), which is the biggest so far. In the United Kingdom, from 2017 to 2021, it was a whopping 1.2 billion GBP (Great Britain Pounds). This is massive. Isn't it amazing?!²

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When the changes in the world begin to determine the pendulum or rhythm of the people, the work of evangelization must surely take on a baton that can strike the right note in the heart of the people. We, the church, must strive to match this movement with similar tempo and constructive agendas. Change in style does not imply a deviation in orientation. Our charisms remain the same, though our approach may take a new or different dimension.

Moreover, living out the Spiritan charism using my own unique gifts gives me a sense of belonging and fulfilment. I see music as something way bigger than singing. It is all about creating harmony in chaos. It encompasses creative activities. Music was in place already, albeit in dishelment, when God spoke order into nature right from the beginning of creation. Through Spiritans Sound Outreach, I simply work to knit my God-given talents into my mission in the best possible way. That is pure music. We can only be useful or productive when we infuse our inherent potential into the world. We become fulfilled when we employ our talents

2. *Treasures Unveiler*, Editorial. December, 2022. 2.

in our mission. We are surely handicapped if we are living out the congregation's charism as missionaries with unfulfilled desires. While we don't strive to impose personal ambition on the community's will, it is imperative for the sake of our shared mission to put our God-given gifts to good use.

The Spiritan founders, who galvanized the activities of the congregation with their unique gifts and motivation would not have desired future missionaries join the congregation faceless and without identity. Special thanks to Very Fr Barnabas Obinna CSSp. He was the Provincial Superior when Spiritans Sound Outreach was hatched. He gave his express blessings. The boost and the moral support I got from my other Spiritan brothers formed a big chunk of my courage.

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SPIRITANS SOUND OUTREACH AND MY SPIRITAN CALLING

I reserve glory and gratitude to God almighty who made me part and parcel of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit at a time the liberty of self-expression (positive) is hugely available and in an era when one is free to exhibit their innate potential. The privilege of being a Spiritan has ignited a sense of fulfilment in me and it has really assisted in self-discovery and development. The Spiritan mode of formation has greatly helped create a resilience which gives me the temerity to delve into unknown waters. I can say at this juncture that my hobbies have indeed become appendages of my apostolate. My musical prowess, although, requires an upgrade, that I know, has added color to my ministry. Writing as a skill has equally contributed to my work of evangelization.

As Spiritans, we are called to make people's well-being and needs topmost in the list of our priorities. Being attentive to the signs of the times³ gives me inexplicable joy attending to the needs of the youth which I think is so important in this present age. As Spiritans, our mission is the evangelization of the "poor" (Lk 4:18). Therefore we reach out especially

- to people, groups and individuals who have barely heard the message of the gospel or who have heard it scantily
- to those whose needs cannot be compromised and to the oppressed
- to areas the Church has difficulty finding workers.⁴

3. *Spiritans Rule of Life*, 25.

4. *Confirm Spiritans Rule of Life*, 12.

People tend to be influenced more by the media in this 21st century than before. Hence, taking on the aforementioned mission demands special obligations for new ways of evangelization. Otherwise, we may not be able to give tangible expression to the gospel and make an impact on the young people of our time, the beloved of God.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

As its initiator, the Spiritans Sound Outreach is driven solely by my personal passion. Because of this, most of the resources and the financial implications fall on my shoulders. I am deeply grateful to the concerned key players who equally throw in their support whenever we have events. Notwithstanding this, it is crystal clear that as an enterprise of one individual, it is a bit tedious running the outreach for substantial growth. Its operations require financial grants and other human resources. To achieve milestones in all of the affairs in which Spiritans Sound Outreach is involved, most especially in the aspect of music, the organisation is in dire need of a state-of-the-art musical studio with all the paraphernalia that come alongside it.

Personal resources are limited in what they can achieve in the execution of the group's day to day tasks and long-term goals. Spiritans Sound Outreach has assumed the image of a corporate entity where people queue to watch as it grows steadily. It is not intended to remain a personal vision, which is what informed the name "Spiritans Sound." I anticipate the day when it is going to be taken over by the congregation. When that happens, I would simply be a mere player in its operations. I look forward to that day when it metamorphoses into a full-blown project of the congregation with an international broadcasting franchise (radio and television) functioning as a platform for the promotion of Spiritan mission worldwide.

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