



Rev. Mother M. Hubert with some of her teachers... Much depends upon young Catholic women such as these...

Teacher - Apostles

By Mother M. Hubert

The Queen of Ugep regarded us with no little suspicion the first time we visited her. Probably it was the first time she had ever seen white women, especially nuns. Travel in those days in the famous "lost province" of Ogoja - it was more than twenty years ago - was something of an adventure. Reverend Mother M. Osmund and I had made the trip by lorry, ferry (logs lashed together) and bush trail to ask the Queen if we could open a Mission school in Ugep. The visit lasted four hours and took much *palaver* but in the end she said "Yes".

Later, we brought Loretto Okon up there to open the school and be headmistress. Loretto was one of the first teachers to be trained in the Holy Child College at Ifuho; she was full of real apostolic zeal. What she accomplished that first year in Ugep was unbelievable. The old Queen did not think much of the Christian religion but she was very fond of Reverend Mother M. Osmund and wanted to be "where the Mothers were" when she died. So Reverend Mother told her to send for Loretto when she felt the end was near.

Meantime, Loretto paid many friendly visits to the royal hut and each time she invariably said the rosary on her way there. One morning while she was in class a small boy came with the message that the old Queen was dying. Loretto went to her immediately, gave her hurried instructions and baptized her. An hour later the Queen was dead. It took courage for the young teacher to brush aside tribal formalities and bring all the school children in to say the rosary. As soon as it was finished the people insisted that she leave so that they could bury the Queen in their own fashion.

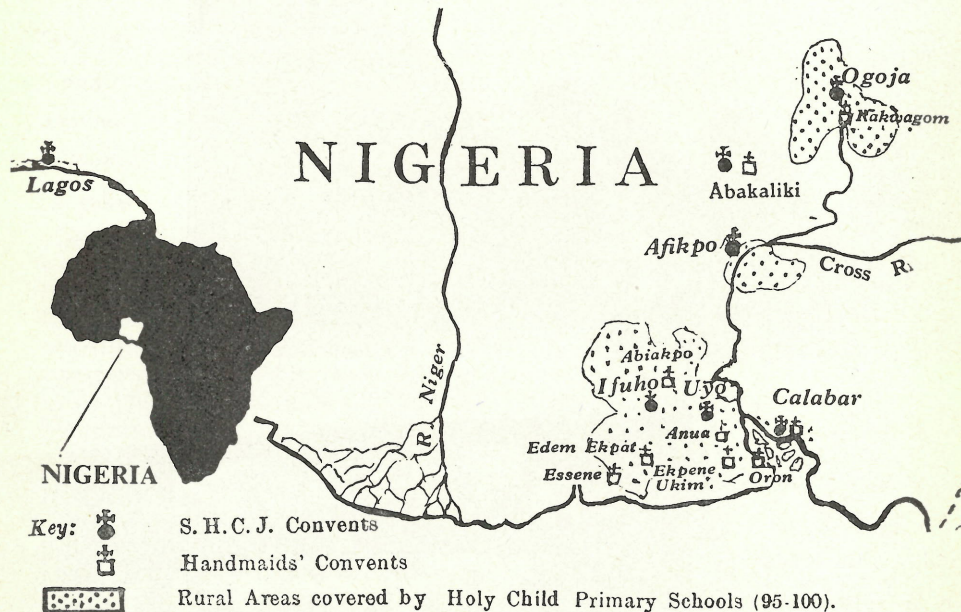
Our aim on the Missions is to give the future teachers, while they are in training, a true Holy Child spirit which they, in turn, hand on to their children. We are so few Sisters among the thousands of children to be taught that we have to depend to a large extent on our teachers to be real apostles and missionaries as well as excellent instructors. Loretto Okon stood out as a perfect exemplar of the teacher-apostle. Fortunately there have been many others like her since those early days.



From the very beginning, the outlying primary schools have been known as "Convent" schools because the Sisters from the Convent were responsible for managing them. The teachers are generally known as "Convent teachers" and the children as "Convent girls" - even though in most cases there are no nuns actually residing in the vicinity. The people like the name and they

like to feel that the Sisters, though living miles away from their little village school, always consider each and every one as their own.

Some of the schools are quite large with the full seven primary classes; some are double stream all the way up, with from 300 to 500 children and from twelve to fifteen teachers. Others are very small. One great difficulty is this: Education is free *only* in the



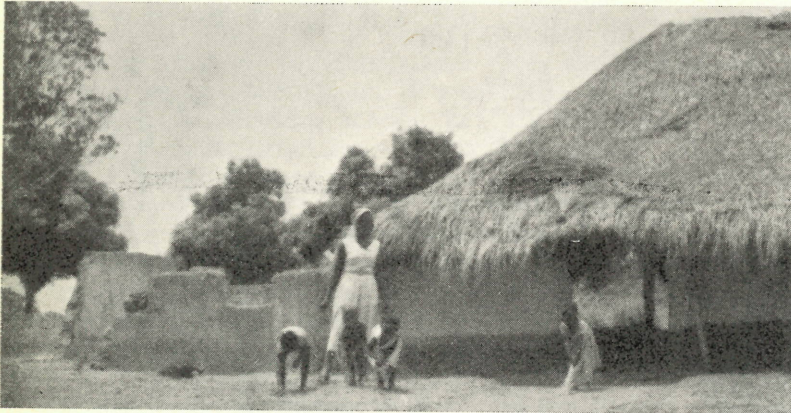
first three years of primary school. Once the children enter their fourth year, the parents have to pay fees. During the 4th and 5th years each class has to collect £ 105 (about \$ 300) and for the 6th and 7th years £ 180 (about \$ 540). If the class is fairly large (36 is the maximum allowed), and the total sum divided among the pupils, they can sometimes just manage to collect these amounts. But if the classes are small, which they are bound to be in rural areas, the sum is exorbitant. So each new year we have to face the sad fact of losing many promising pupils because of the fees. (The families do what they can but their average income in these regions is very low.)

Our direst problem, the one that dogs every step we take, is this: *How to raise the amount needed so that the children can continue going to school.* That is why we depend on our generous friends

at home to give as much as they can to enable us to carry on this important work of education, the work that the eminent Bishop Shanahan used to call "the trunk of the tree". All the other good works he considered as the branches. "It is for you to teach". he told the first Holy Child Missionaries when he brought them to his beloved Nigeria in 1930. And that has been our main work.

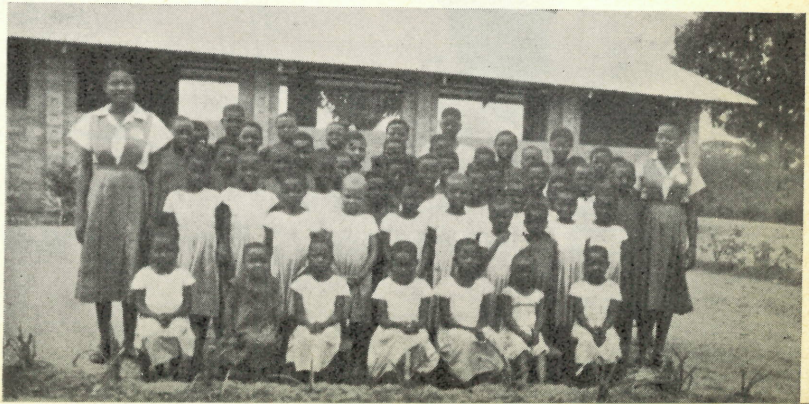
This year many hundreds of teachers, who come from our Holy Child Teacher Training Colleges, are staffing primary schools in Nigeria and Ghana. The first of these colleges was at Ifuho and others have been opened at Afikpo, Ogoja, Oron (Nigeria) and at Takoradi (Ghana).

In most bush schools our teachers live together like one big family in the teachers' house right in the school compound. And their life is very full. In addition to their classroom work, many of them



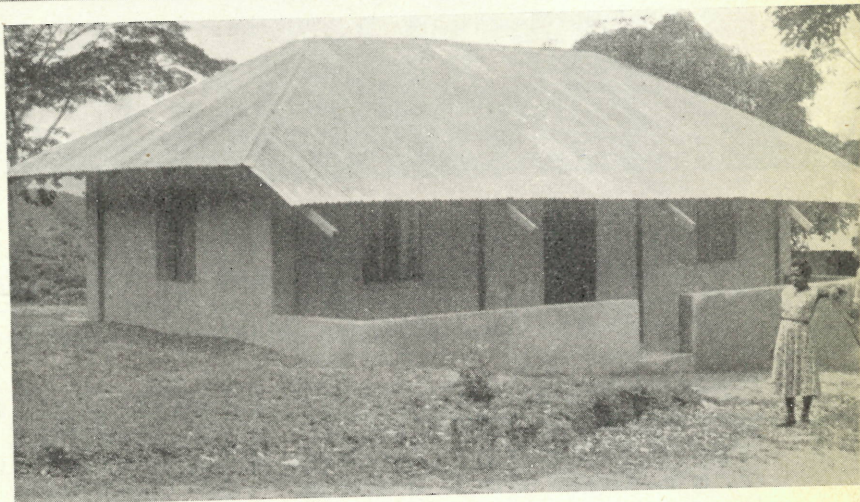
The old
Ukpa
Convent
School -
after a
storm.

The new Ukpa
School
built with funds
sent from the U. S.





The teachers' house at
Uburu which houses six
teachers



An ideal
teachers'
house.

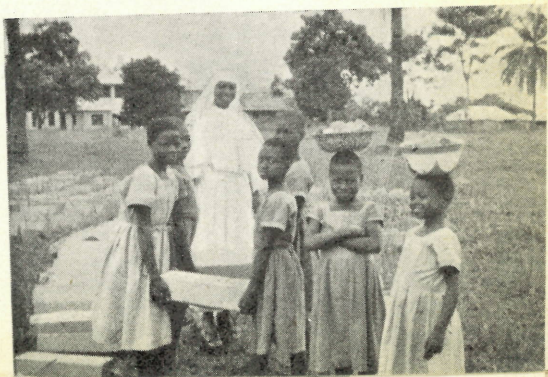
Cost - £ 100
(\$ 285)

give Catechism lessons three times a week to groups of children preparing for the Sacraments, Baptism, Penance, First Holy Communion - and later on, Confirmation. They also go to nearby villages or towns to give religious instruction to the grown-up people who do not like to go to the school compound because they say that "school is for *piccins*". It is part of the apostolate for the Convent teachers to go out among the villagers near their school and try to help them in every way possible. Once a year these teachers come to the central Convent for a closed Retreat of two or three days. They are wonderful young women, taking difficulties in their stride, laughing, playing, praying together in

a little world that is often surrounded by jungle.

It is one of our crowning joys as Holy Child Sisters on the Missions to have so many of our own children sharing with us the great privilege of spreading the Kingdom of Christ among our African people.

Sister Mary Thomas with children who are carrying blocks and stones in basins for their new school at Kakwagom.





The
winds
blew ...
and
the
roof
went ...
at
Ugep.

... Seven are not yet *permanent* ...
An Appeal from Mother M. Bridget.

From Afikpo we manage 21 primary schools for girls in the surrounding bush country. (*Surrounding* is an elastic term in Africa; in this case it can mean 50 to 70 miles away). Seven of these schools are still in the mud-and-hope stage without a permanent building - Ezza, Ekuri, Mkpani, Adun, Amudn Okpoto, and Ameka.

The Education Department has issued a general warning in the newspapers that "redundant and mushroom schools will be closed." For that reason we are anxious to have one permanent building in each school compound. A 4-room cement block structure with zinc roof costs about \$ 1755 or £ 650, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less. In areas where sand and stone are plentiful, the children can be prevailed upon to bring sand and stones to help out.

Our schools are located in nine different parishes, and, without

the aid of the St. Patrick Fathers in these Missions, the Convent School could not survive.

In Ugep where we have 12 classes in 7 rooms, Reverend Father

Father Kittrick and M. Philip Neri inspect the new permanent school at Ugep that he is erecting for the Sisters. Children in the rear are carrying sand for the building.





A march-past of the student teachers at the Afikpo stadium.

Kittrick has given generously of his time, labour and money to help us to erect another six-room block. Ugep is a Standard VI School and one of our oldest. We had been notified by the Education authorities that unless another classroom block was ready this year, the Senior primary department would be closed. We had a little money - very little - and hesitated to start, but Father Kettrick began the work and carried it on through many difficulties.

Since November of 1960 the school at Onuafor has been under a palm shelter. Up to that time there had been a mud building. Then, one morning about a year ago, a messenger arrived with a note. "Bad news, Peter?" I ask-

ed. He grinned but it was not Peter's usual happy ear-to-ear grin. One of the teachers at Onuafor had written: "Reverend Mother, I have a little problem for you to solve. I am sorry to bother you but last night in a storm the school building fell to the ground and now we are teaching under a tree."

With the help of Reverend Father Liam O'Byrne a permanent 4-room building is nearing completion now at Onuafor. When Mother Philip Neri returned from leave in the United States she brought a generous offering towards this building.

Okpoto blew down last year and is still down. The girls are occupying space in the boys' school but this is frowned on by the authorities.

**It is a great day for these young teachers when the Manager arrives.
Rev. Mother M. Bridget receives a hearty welcome.**





Ekurie — it was a classroom. M. Philip Neri and the teacher find ample “air-conditioning” under bamboo poles which have lost their mats.

Our project for this year is Ezza. Here the numbers are good, it is directly across the road from the Mission and should be a thriving little school. The day after school began last January there was a freak storm and the roof settled to the ground. The people came and

Adun — The side walls are partly down but the head teacher and her little sister are still smiling.



raised it just enough so that one can enter by stooping low. It is on this school that we are concentrating all efforts for 1961 to build a permanent classroom block.

In the compounds where we do have one permanent building, the classes are spilling over and must be accommodated under palm shelters. Several schools are ready for Senior Primary as far as children go — but the Education Office will



The heart of the Apostolate.
The Chapel at Afikpo.

not give permission for it until we can show adequate facilities.

Why so much stress on schools in these rural areas of Africa? Because only by education in the Truth can we set these people free with the liberty of the children of God.