

SNAKES ARE SACRED IN ISHIAGU

By

Benedicta Okonkwo, Headmistress
of the Holy Child School, Ishiagu.

I am a Catholic teacher in a
place that is mostly pagan.

Ishiagu is about 45 miles from
Enugu and 106 miles from Port
Harcourt. Politically, it is in
Abakaliki Province and ecclesias-
tically, it is under the episcopacy
of Bishop Thomas McGettrick who
lives in Ogoja. Our nearest Holy
Child Sisters are at Afikpo which
is 40 miles distance.

The people in this section are
mainly farmers and potters, and
the greater percentage are pagans.
The number of Christians is en-
couraging, however. Ishiagu seems
to be a fertile soil for the seed of
religion, but it is regrettable to
remark that the Christians are
afraid of the pagans. If they
were courageous and zealous, the
Christians could make a lot of
converts. But they fear the "chil-
dren of darkness" and find it
difficult to ask them to put away
the worship of idols for the sweet
yoke of Christ. So evil practices
continue. It is very alarming to
see that the green snakes, which
are killed in all other parts of the
world, are adored at Ishiagu by
the pagans. They regard them as
sacred. In the middle of the rainy
season one sees a great number of
these snakes crawling everywhere,
even on the walls of the class-
rooms and on the benches and
desks. Most of the pupils play

THE PYLON

**Benedicta
with
M. Philip
Neri and
M. M.
Oliver at
Legion
meeting.**



**Correcting
exercise
books
is all part
of the
day's work**



**Children
cut grass
with
machetes
to
discourage
snakes
from
going to
school.**



**Benedicta
teaches
a pupil
how to
say the
rosary.**





An extra-curricular activity-teaching the choir. Young Africans have a natural aptitude for Gregorian music.

with these dreadful creatures on the pretext that the snakes are harmless; others run away in fear. Nobody could kill these snakes in the presence of pagans. Anyone who does so arouses the anger of the pagans who insist on punishing that person severely, either with a fine of two pounds or by destroying some valuable or cherished property belonging to him.

If a bicycle or car crushes one of these snakes it must be destroyed.

Fortunately, some of the Christians at Ishiagu are putting their weight in professing their faith and spreading it. There are two religious organizations: The Legion of Mary and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. The members assemble a number of pagans in the different villages and impart to them religious knowledge twice or thrice a week.

The three Christian churches in this section are the A.G.M. Mission, the Methodist Mission and the Catholic Mission. All three are doing their best to Christianize the people.

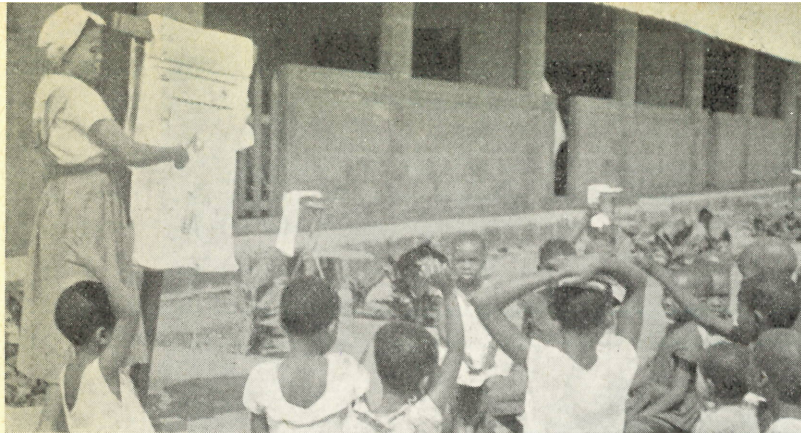
The education for girls is not popular in Ishiagu. Most of the parents are unwilling to send their girls to school because they feel that educating them is useless. They are interested in giving their daughters out for early marriage to get the dowry. This accounts for the poor enrolment in our Ishiagu Convent School which is a Standard Four school. There are only two trained women teachers from Ishiagu town itself, and about five girls studying in the teachers' training college at present. This is very poor indeed. Even the few trained women teachers were educated by their husbands and the fees for those in the training colleges are being paid by their prospective husbands.

No Ishiagu girl has attended a secondary school as yet. This is a challenge to all parents in this vicinity. It is high time that Ishiagu people realize that both boys and girls should have equal education.

The Reverend Fathers and the Nuns are doing their best to make the people see the right thing to do in this matter. Reverend Mother M. Bridget comes to Ishiagu each month and speaks to the children and often to the women. We hope that in future they will understand the importance of education for girls and that they will allow their trained girls to teach for a long time before giving them for marriage.

The enrolment in our Convent school now is 186; the girls in attendance are polite and always cheerful. We have six women teachers on the staff, all from different towns and none from Ishiagu. They are hardworking, courteous and eager to raise the standard of the girls' education in Ishiagu.

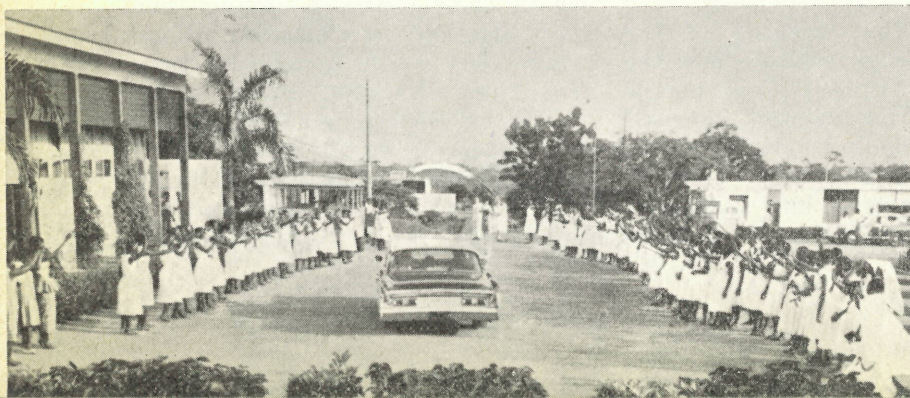
God bless their work.



Margaret Offiong teaches Class 1 at Edem Edet, 7 miles from Ifuho.

In 1960, Mother M. Elizabeth, H. C. J., became supervisor of more than 50 primary schools for girls. From her office in Ifuho she directs some 400 young teachers and travels about 600 miles a week to help them individually. Her story is promised for a future *Pylon*.

American Ambassador Russell and Mrs. Russell visit the Holy Child Teacher Training College at Takoradi, Ghana. The Ambassador presents the head of the College, Theresa Mensah, with a set of American classics.



The students wave good-by to the Ambassador's party