

**CNI**  
CHURCH  
NEWS  
IRELAND

## International

**'Mama Diocese' - ministry of bishop's wife**

**6 million people have attended events with Pope Francis. Vatican invites Blair for Syria talks**



## **'Mama Diocese': the ministry of a Nigerian bishop's wife**

*Mrs Kwashi sees her role as that of complementing the ministry of her husband Bishop Jacob Kwashi,*

### **In Nigeria's**

**Zonkwa Diocese, the name given to the Bishop's wife is 'Mama Diocese'. This more than just an affectionate title. It reveals the current incumbent's passion for, and commitment to the women and girls in her care.**

Rhoda Kwashi sees her role as that of complementing the ministry of her husband Bishop Jacob Kwashi, but with particular focus on equipping women of the diocese. In Zonkwa, as in many dioceses in Nigeria, both, bishops' and clergy wives have an official role to play in leading women programmes; many of which are under the auspices of the Mothers' Union.

Travelling around two archdeaconries with Mrs Kwashi, it is clear her commitment to the diocese's women is more than simply duty, rather she believes that every woman has a role to play in the community.

"If pastors wives are not equipped they can't be role models to the many women they are responsible for in the parishes their husbands lead," she said. "Women are the majority in the Church but are less equipped, and therefore it makes sense that women are adequately equipped in order to run



the affairs of the Church effectively and to impact on the communities where the Church is found.”

### ***A shared responsibility***

Both she and the Diocese believe in the shared ministry of clergy and their spouses. On the day priests are ordained, their wives are given certificates to confirm their role in parishes where their husbands serve. In Zonkwa, ordination retreats for clergy also involve the pastors' wives. The Diocese has introduced Spiritual reflection, led by the Bishop and 'Mama Diocese', which brings together the clergy and their spouses for prayer and support on common concerns.

What's more, as part of the vision to encourage women participation in all affairs of the Church, it is mandatory to have women represented at the Diocesan Synod from every Deanery in Zonkwa Diocese.

### ***Mama can't be everywhere***

Zonkwa is a rural diocese where the majority of the people rely on subsistence farming, and where most women are 'home-makers'. Some of these were married at a very early age. Mentoring such young women and

girls is something that is done by the wives of the diocese's other priests as Mama Diocese can't be everywhere!

Mrs Kwashi stresses that "The presence and role of the pastors' wives is important but unless they are equipped, they cannot fulfil the role that is expected of them." This is why, at the start of each year, Mrs Kwashi ensures that a Bible Study resource is produced and available for women and girl guilds throughout the diocese in the Hausa language—the common language to all the people in area.

Along with the Bible Study, the programme for empowerment of women and pastors' wives includes physical, financial, and spiritual wellbeing. Currently the Diocesan Women's Ministry team under Mrs Kwashi's leadership trains women in sewing and knitting. When the diocese contracted the Women's Ministry to produce all Anglican Church school uniforms there, the income allowed other women to have access to the skills training programme in knitting and sewing.

The Women's Ministry team is also overseeing the construction of a multipurpose building which will not only house the activities of women ministry, but also generate income for the women empowerment programmes and projects through renting part of the building. The Mothers' Union and Women Guild also own a tuck-shop to cater for students' needs at a combined Anglican Church Secondary and Primary school within the Cathedral grounds. This also raises much-needed funds.



"We try and reach every area," said Mrs Kwashi, "Women, men, and young people!

"A seminar for youth on 'challenges of youth in the twenty-first century' was held this year and more than 40 young people attended.

"We also organised a seminar for men, just



before Father's Day in 2012, and more than one hundred men attended from about 22 deaneries." At this conference a speaker challenged the men on the theme: 'Discovering your purpose as a man'.

Although Men's Fellowships have become more effective following the seminar, Mrs Kwashi observed that women, particularly the Mothers' Union, have risen to the challenge of taking responsibility for the boys in the Church. They did this following a challenge in September this year by the Provincial Standing Committee to do so, because it was believed there was little chance that men would do much to lead and support the boy child.

It appears that Mama Diocese and her sisters in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) are making a real difference in a rural diocese where women might otherwise not have the opportunity to flourish.

"We are creating impact, slow and slow - we are excited and encouraged about the vision for women in the Diocese," said Mrs Kwashi with a grin.

## More than 6 million people have attended events with Pope Francis

**More than 6.6 million people participated in papal events at the Vatican during the first nine months of Francis's pontificate, including weekly general audiences, group audiences, liturgies and recitations of the Angelus and "Regina Coeli" on Sundays and holy days.**

The statistics, compiled by the Prefecture of the Pontifical Household and released January 2, do not include figures from Pope Francis's trip to Brazil for World Youth Day in July 2013, or his visits to Italian locations outside the Vatican.



From his election March 13 until the end of 2013, at least 1.5 million people attended Pope Francis' 30 general audiences; more than 87,000 participated in group audiences; almost 2.3 million participated in papal liturgies in St. Peter's Basilica or St. Peter's Square; and more

than 2.7 million joined the pope for the Angelus or the “Regina Coeli” in the square.

The numbers are approximate, based on tickets issued or estimates of crowd size, depending on the event.

By comparison, during the year following the election of Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005, more than 4 million people attended papal events at the Vatican and the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

In 1979, the first full calendar year of Blessed John Paul II’s pontificate, nearly 1.6 million requested tickets for his weekly public audiences.

## Vatican invites Blair for Syria talks

**Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Egyptian Vice President Mohamed ElBaradei are among the key political experts invited by the Vatican for a one-day meeting aimed at promoting a cease-fire in Syria, the protection of Christians there and a transitional and unified government.**

The Vatican meeting on January 13 will come ahead of major peace talks on January 22 in Geneva between the Syrian government and opposition forces.



Sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the daylong Vatican “workshop” will seek to propose “a cease-fire to make humanitarian aid possible” in Syria; an end to “persecutions

against Christians to encourage interreligious dialogue; a transitional authority to organize elections (and) a unified national government also responsible for the military sector and security;" as well as an end to human trafficking and prostitution in the war-torn nation.

The meeting's title is "Syria: With a death toll of 126,000 and 300,000 orphans in 36 months of war, can we remain indifferent?"

The eight-page programme, prepared by the sciences academy, gave a brief background of the Syrian conflict. It said US calls for Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down "put the U.S. in effective opposition to the United Nations' peace initiative" put forth in early 2012.

"Russia argued that America's insistence on Assad's immediate departure was an impediment to peace. In this, perhaps Russia was right," the booklet said.

However, while Russia backed UN peace initiatives, it also – with Iran – "supplied more and more sophisticated weapons to the regime" as the US and other countries financed the rebels, it said.

The Vatican invited eight international experts and leaders to discuss the tragedy unfolding in Syria, the political stances of the major international players involved and possible solutions.

With opening remarks by French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the invited speakers are:

- Blair, founder of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and official envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East: the U.N., European Union, Russia and the United States.
- ElBaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, 2005 Nobel Peace Prize winner, and a major figure in Egypt's revolution against ousted Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Mohammed Morsi.
- U.S. economist and adviser Jeffrey Sachs, who is active in the world fight against poverty and hunger.
- Thomas Walsh, a U.S. expert in interreligious peace building and security, international president of the Universal Peace Federation.

- Pyotr Stegny, a former diplomat and expert in Russian diplomacy and foreign policy in the Middle East.
- Joseph Maila, a Lebanese expert on the Middle East, Islam and politics.
- Miguel Angel Moratinos, a Spanish diplomat and member of congress who served seven years as the European Union special representative for the Middle East peace process.
- Thierry de Montbrial, a French economist and expert in international relations.

The workshop programme outlined Pope Francis' calls, prayers and diplomatic efforts for peace in the region. It credited Russian President Vladimir Putin with convincing US President Barack Obama to not carry out its threat of military strikes on Syria in September in response to the reported use of chemical weapons against civilians by forces loyal to Assad.

With the upcoming "Geneva II" talks, the "resumption of the U.N. peace process, this time with the U.S. and Russia on the same side to prevent violence, might succeed in keeping al-Qaida at bay – a shared interest – and finding a pragmatic long-term solution for Syria's complex internal divisions," it said.

Meanwhile, a two-person delegation representing the Syrian government delivered a letter for Pope Francis from Assad. The letter was delivered December 28 when the Syrians met at the Vatican with Archbishop Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Vatican foreign minister.

The Vatican confirmed the delegates gave the Pope "a message" that illustrated the position of the Syrian government.

While the Vatican gave no details about the letter's contents, Syria's state-run SANA agency reported the message said Assad's government was ready for peace talks but wanted foreign countries to stop supporting "the armed terrorist groups" in Syria.

The president also said in his message that he appreciated the Pope's December 25 call for an end to the violence in Syria, the news agency said.

Assad told the Pope “the crisis will be solved through national dialogue among the Syrians and under a Syrian leadership without foreign intervention as to enable the Syrians to determine their future and leadership through ballots,” SANA reported.

The January talks in Geneva are a follow-up to a meeting in June 2012 when international parties proposed a peace plan calling for a transitional government body in an effort to end a civil war that began in March 2011.

The conflict between Assad’s government and rebel forces has killed more than 100,000 people, driven 2 million refugees out of Syria and displaced more than 4 million inside the country.