

Most Rev. Peter Ebere Okpaleke
Bishop of Ahiara
C/o Diocesan Catholic Secretariat
P.M.B. 5021
Awka
Anambra State
February 14, 2018

Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria
C/o The President
Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama
Archbishop of Jos

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I write this letter to you my dear Brothers to express my sincere gratitude to you both as individuals and as a group for the fraternity you have shown me since my appointment and consecration as the Bishop of Ahiara Diocese. I thank you for the spirit of brotherhood manifested through your closeness, concern and support these more than five years of my special experience of carrying the Cross of Christ.

We are all familiar with the situation in Ahiara Diocese. Although even now, a few of the priests and some lay faithful accepted me and have continued to manifest their desire to have me as their diocesan Bishop, a group of priests and some lay faithful have continued to manifest their unwillingness to accept me and collaborate with me as their diocesan Bishop. These years have really been years of agony and purification. However, I thank God for everything.

Taking the above into consideration, **I am convinced, in conscience that my remaining the bishop of Ahiara is no longer beneficial to the Church.** I do not think that my apostolate in a diocese where some of the priests and lay faithful are very ill disposed to have me in their midst would be effective. **Exercising the ministry in a diocese where priests who are supposed to be my immediate and closest collaborators, brothers, friends and sons are at war with one another, with the laity and with me as their chief shepherd would be disastrous and a threat to salvation of souls – including my own soul.**

Therefore, for the good of the Church and the Catholic diocese of Ahiara in particular, I have requested the Holy Father to accept my resignation from the position of the Bishop of Ahiara Diocese. I have taken this step also for the good of all the faithful of Ahiara diocese especially those that have remained faithful in a local Church held hostage by some priests.

I consider my resignation from the position of Bishop of Ahiara as the only proper option now to facilitate re-evangelisation of the faithful and most importantly and urgently, the priests of Ahiara diocese especially now that the Holy Father and his collaborators in the Roman Curia

can now decipher priests who actually affirmed their loyalty to the Holy Father and those who decided to bow out of the Catholic Church in disobedience.

I thank all of you especially those of you who were at the centre of the storm – the President of the Conference, the Cardinal Archbishop of Abuja and Apostolic Administrator of Ahiara, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Owerri, our elder brother and father Francis Cardinal Arinze, the Bishops of Owerri Province and the plenary assembly of our Bishops Conference. You have had sleepless nights, nerve-wracking and tempestuous sessions in the effort to address the issues that arose. Many of you were hit by verbal missiles, had mud slung at them, were misunderstood, called names and persecuted in one form or another. Please take it as part of the difficulties you encountered for the sake of the Gospel and for which Jesus in the Beatitude promised eternal recompense (Matt 5:10). For those who felt caught in the eye of the hurricane and are still overwhelmed by the present challenges to our faith, we believe that God, in His own time, will give us the courage to overcome these difficulties. Ours is a forgiving God. He heals and strengthens us in all situations.

I pray that God will help us maintain the brotherhood and unity of purpose we have shown as Bishops of Nigeria and that the wound which the crisis in Ahiara diocese have inflicted on the universal Church and the Church in Nigeria in particular may heal very soon and the diocese with a new Ordinary can take her proper place in the assembly of Bishops in Nigeria.

I humbly request for fraternal prayers from each of you while assuring each of you of my prayers and best wishes for you and your pastoral ministry. I remain,

Fraternally yours'

+ Peter Ebere Okpaleke
Bishop of Ahiara