



## HISTORY OF SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF APOSTLES (OLA) IN NIGERIA: INITIATORS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Guidance and Counselling has progressed significantly in Nigeria, originally serving as an organised formal aid for young individuals, particularly those in secondary school and beyond, as well as providing essential direction for anyone seeking wholesome assistance in navigating life's challenges. In Nigeria, it has been noted that this important field was initiated by some Irish Sisters, and this work aims to highlight their contributions in establishing the foundation for guidance and counselling in Nigeria, as well as creating and fostering the development of productive personalities and citizens within the Nigerian society.*

**Key words:** *Guidance, Counselling, OLA Sisters, Female education*

### Introduction

Guidance and Counselling is an age long activity. The human person as a social being has in one way or another sought advice, help and support from his/her fellow beings. Traditionally therefore, guidance and counselling was sought from persons who are considered to be knowledgeable and experienced and had evolved from one level to another. Their services were employed to solve emotional, psychological, social problems/challenges etc. Ojuolape (2023) commented that traditional guidance and counselling is the aboriginal ways (putting into consideration the beliefs and customs) in which a person or persons of authority in the society consciously and/or unconsciously steer individuals towards a path for developing potentials, fulfilling societal demands and modifying undesirable behaviours. Hence in family and communal living, guidance and counselling were provided by family heads, elders, traditional priests or fortune tellers.

These aforementioned sets of persons provided help and gave direction on matters relating to moral and social development, vocational and skill acquisition, marriage etc. Over time, Western Civilization in Nigeria changed the orientation of traditional guidance and counselling because various religious groups emerged during this period and from thence it derived a new path as a process of providing career or professional guidance to young people and much more forming them for life. As such NOUN (2022) opined that guidance is a professionally planned programme, purposely designed to help handle problems of individual adjustments in school, home, industries and society to maximum human performance. It further expressed counselling as a helping profession or guiding the process in decision making where the client makes the decision based on quality information given by the counsellor on the seeming unsolvable conflict. From the foregoing, Guidance and counselling is the approach that ensures that an individual receives the right educational information and services (formally or informally) as he/she navigates communal and societal challenges helping him/her to solve life's problems. It should be noted that the process of guidance and counselling demands the individual's openness, cooperation and participation. To this Salgong (2016) commented that guidance and counselling are essential elements in discipline management and guiding an individual's behaviour pattern in the interest of the group which must be continuously employed for the harmonious achievement of a common purpose.

Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria began in 1959 by some reverend sisters as observed by Fareo (2020). This activity seemed to be somewhat formal and different from the usual traditional form of guidance and words of advice given to the young at home either as an admonition or in school as a



collective moral class instruction. According to Omoniyi (2016), organized and formal guidance and counseling service in Nigeria started in 1959 at St. Theresa's College, Oke-Ado Ibadan, by a group of dedicated religious reverend sisters who had the perception of the need for proper guidance in job selection for their secondary school leavers. It is noted that they took steps to invite some twenty outsiders to advise them about placing sixty of their final-year female students in appropriate careers. These advisers though not vocational guidance specialists, formed the core of what later became the Nigerian Career Council. This was about eight decades after the birth of established and functional guidance and counselling services in America.

Olowolabi (2021) added that the reverend sisters assisted by Mrs. Oruwariye extended an invitation to interested and more enlightened people in the community and experts in many fields of endeavour who had achieved success to give career talks to their final-year students. Indeed that year, the Catholic Reverend Sisters of St. Teresa's College in Ibadan saw the importance of providing the young women with sufficient career choice assistance, for looking for immediate employment and adjusting to hard societal conditions after graduation. Beyond this, the sisters projected the art of forming productive personalities in the near future for the common good of society and the benefit of the young women themselves. This initiative and action was to open their imaginations and potentialities to a wider horizon of what they (students) could become or what they could evolve into. As this period was just a year before Nigerian independence from colonial rule, it appeared that it brought a greater prospect to these young women who would be faced with challenges in male-dominated organisations and a patriarchal society. Catholic Herald (2021) noted one of the 1959 set of students as Mrs. Regina Titilola Johnson (nee Williams, who attested that the school remains a pacesetter and citadel of knowledge and envisaged that the school authority should continue on that trajectory St. Teresa College Ibadan is known for, over the decades.

Accordingly, fifty-four out of the sixty students were placed in various jobs after graduation. CASSON (2024) commented that the efforts of the Rev. Sisters later metamorphosed into the coming into being of the Ibadan Careers Council as a formal platform for promoting career counselling practice in schools across the then Western Region of Nigeria in 1962 to help students achieve their goals. Other states and cities like Benin, Lagos, Enugu, Kano and Kaduna followed up by forming their career councils. Later on, the Nigeria Career Council was formed in 1967. This body contributed immensely to the development of Guidance and Counselling Nigeria.

### **OLA Sisters and female education in Nigeria**

The sisters who worked in St. Theresa's College, Ibadan and who were initiators of guidance and counselling in Nigeria belonged to the congregation of Religious women called *Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles* or *OLA Sisters*. This congregation of women was founded in France in 1876 by Venerable Fr. Augustine Planque SMA for evangelising Africa and particularly caring and educating/training women and children. The founder who was co-founder of the Society of African Missions called SMA Fathers was filled with the desire to meet the spiritual, social cum moral needs of the African women and children who were difficult to reach by the SMA fathers due to the overly conservative nature of the African culture. Escallier (1995) quoted the words of the founder to the Reverend Fathers on the missions in reaching the women and children as thus, "You will not be able to work among the women yourselves, yet you will try to attend to this part of your flock too".

Thus this priest – the founder made several attempts to get over fifteen different congregations to cater to the needs of the women and children on African soil but only received a favourable response from the Franciscan Sisters of Couzon-au-Mont'd'Or from France to fulfill his desire and mission of formation of the girl-child. As reiterated by Cummins (2023) the OLA sisters have a special mandate for the education, formation and betterment of the life of the African woman. Thus the Sisters' undaunted call to uplift the status of the African woman as independent, efficient, dynamic, resourceful and courageous figures in family life and nation-building cannot be undermined. In effect, the sisters



arrived in Lagos, Nigeria according to Eschailer (1995) sometime in the year 1872 and by March, 1873 established a primary school on Broad Street Lagos named St. Mary's Convent School. It started as a girls' school with its first set of pupils being children of Brazilians (Obamwonyi, 2018).

This makes St. Mary Convent School founded by the Sisters the first girls' primary school in Nigeria. Though the first primary and secondary schools in Nigeria were founded by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Badagry (1845) and Bariga (1859) respectively, of worthy note is the fact that the first single-sex (female) primary school to date remains St. Mary's Convent School, Lagos founded by the Sisters. The administration of this school continued and waxed stronger with the foundation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles three years later in 1876 and according to Eschailer (1995) by November 1877 the first Irish OLA Sister Sr. Dominique O'Riordan followed by Sr. Felicite Kirwan, arrived Lagos to join their predecessors.

Female education in Nigeria as at the time the OLA sisters delved into the education system in Nigeria was at a staggering low percentage. For instance, as of 1920, only two female secondary schools were established i.e Methodist Girls High School, Lagos (1879) and St. Anne's School, Molete Ibadan, (1896), the third female secondary school was Queens College established in 1927, eighteen years after the establishment of Kings College, Lagos in 1909. Saka (2019) observed that by 1920, out of 25 secondary schools established then, three were girls only and the remainder were exclusively for boys. For the OLA Sisters, attention to female education from their tender age is of paramount importance to give a veritable and sound foundation/formation to them. St. Mary's Convent School founded by the sisters in 1873 as the first female primary school in Nigeria, is an attestation to this.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA Sisters) can categorically be termed as pacesetters in girl-child education and women empowerment throughout Nigeria. The foundation of educational institutions in various parts of Nigeria remains a testimony to this fact. Some other primary schools founded by the sisters though as mixed schools are: St. Mary's Private School, Ajele/Broad Street Lagos (1926), OLA Private School, Yaba, Lagos (1950), Maryland Convent Private School, Lagos, (1967), Emotan Primary School, Benin City (1957) (taken over by the government), Maryhill Convent School, Ibadan (1956), Regina Mundi (OLA) Private School, Asaba (1967) OLA Private School, Benin (1971) and many others. For the OLA Sisters, women are nation builders and all resources must be put in place to equip them to fulfill their mission as role models, home makers, bridge builders, managers, vessels of peace and harmony and lots more.

Below are some Teacher Training Colleges and vocational schools founded by the OLA sisters solely for women. Presently, they have been converted to other models of education by the government to suit the prevalent needs in the Nigerian educational system.

#### Teacher Training Colleges

S/N	Name of Institution	Year	Location
1.	Mount Carmel Teacher Training College	1928	Ebute-Meta, Lagos.
2.	Sacred Heart Teacher Training College	1944	Ubiaja, Edo State.
3.	OLA Teacher Training College	1948	Kaduna
4.	Maryfield Teacher Training College	1954	Ughelli, Delta State.
5.	OLA Teacher Training College	1957	Ibadan, Oyo State.
6.	OLA Teacher Training College	1957	Akwanga

*Reseracher's collection & Obamwonyi (2018)*

#### Vocational schools

S/N	Name of Institution	Year	Location
1.	Convent Boarding School	1892	Topo, Badagry.
2.	St. Brigid's Social Centre	1963	Ibadan, Oyo State.
3.	St. Anne's Social Centre	1964	Benin City, Edo State.
4.	OLA Social Centre	1970	Asaba, Delta State.



**Some secondary schools also founded by the OLA Sisters are:**

S/N	Name of Institution	Year	Location
1.	St. Teresa's College	1933	Ibadan, Oyo State.
2.	Queen of Apostles College (now Queen Amina College)	1942	Kakuri, Kaduna State.
3.	Marymount College	1954	Agbor, Delta State.
4.	Our Lady of Apostles Secondary School (OLASS)	1954	Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
5.	Our Lady of Apostles Secondary School (OLASS)	1956	Yaba, Lagos State.
6.	Queen of Apostles Secondary School	1955	Ibadan, Oyo State.
7.	Marywood Secondary Commercial School	1957	Apapa, Lagos State.
8.	Mary Way Secondary Commercial	1957	Ibadan, Oyo State.
9.	St. Maria Goretti Secondary School	1959	Benin City, Edo State.
10.	St. Teresa's Girls Secondary	1965	Ughelli, Delta State.
11.	St. Mary's Girls Secondary	1965	Iwo, Oyo State.
12.	Our Lady of Apostles Girls High School	1966	Effurun, Delta State.
13.	St. Brigid's Secondary School	1967	Asaba, Delta State.
14.	Maryland Comprehensive High School	1969	Ikeja, Lagos State.
15.	Our Lady of Apostles Premier College (OLAPC)	2008	Benin City, Edo State.

*Researcher's collection*

The above schools were taken over by the government in the '70s but schools number 3, 5, 12, 13 and 14 were returned to the catholic missions a few years ago. The last school which is a recent one is a mixed secondary school.

**St. Teresa's College, Oke-Ado cradle of Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria**

The secondary school for girls founded by the sisters was St. Teresa's College established in 1933. It began as the proverbial mustard seed in a small space in Lagos. Obamwonyi (2018) recorded that it started at 2, Campbell Street, Lagos on 31st January, 1933 and was blessed two days later by His Lordship Bishop O'Rourke on 2nd February, 1933. It had Sr. Breda Hayes OLA as the school Principal assisted by Miss. Mary Maxwell later known as Sr. Mary Michael EHJ (Obamwonyi, 2018). Towards the end of that year on 14th November to be precise the school was moved to another space on 20, Broad Street Lagos. Most of the first set of forty-three students of the school came from St. Mary's Convent School, Broad Street Lagos.

As the school grew in number over the following years, space became a challenge so in the year 1946 St. Teresa's College was finally moved to its permanent location in Oke-Ado Ibadan with Sr. Sylvester Hogan OLA as the school principal and at that time Sr. James (Eileen) Fraser OLA and Sr. Michael Irwin OLA also worked in the school in various capacities. Invariably, St Teresa's College attended to the needs of girls in the Southern part of Nigeria while Queen of Apostles College, Kakuri-Kaduna established in 1942, met the needs of girls in the Northern part of Nigeria to attain qualitative secondary education. Catholic Herald (2021) reported that the Archbishop emeritus of Ibadan Most Rev. Felix Alaba Job commented that the school is known to be best in academics, best in formation and complete human development during the ceremony of the anniversary of the 1967 – 1971 set who were celebrating 50 years after graduation in the year 2021.

At the time the school was 26 years old in 1959, Sr. Henrietta Power OLA as principal of the school with her team of sisters and teachers initiated the course of guidance and counselling in Nigeria. The burning desire to maintain the core value and mission of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles to empower the girl-child and women stirred once more in the heart of Sr. Henrietta Power OLA to form her young women, by directing and re-directing them with improved and professional resources. Consequently, she and her team planted the seeds of this noble venture (guidance and counselling) that has bloomed and thus began a worthwhile profession for Nigerian citizens. This career guidance and



counselling nourished young women into personalities of integrity who respect life and all it entails. It is recorded that among the first graduates from the University of Ibadan were past students of St. Teresa's College.

CASSON (2024) recounted that the pioneer efforts of the reverend sisters served as the foundation for the various bureaucratic initiatives in the Federal Ministry of Education in the 1980s, resulting in the recognition of the need for school guidance and counselling programmes in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (1979, 1981). Some old girls of the schools are renowned and outstanding women in Nigerian Society. They include as reported by Channels TV (2021) Hon. Dr. Abike Dabiri-Erewa OON, Late Mrs. Stella Obasanjo (former first lady of Nigeria), Mrs. Omolewa Ahmed (former first lady of Kwara State 2011 – 2019), late Sr. Agnes Hassan OLA, Olori Tokunbo Gbadebo, Ambassador Sefi Atta, Mrs. Sidi Osho, Olori Bisi Tejuosho, Dame Marie Fatai-Williams to mention but a few.

### **Challenges of guidance and counselling at inception in Nigeria**

Some hitches were evident in the entrenchment of guidance and counselling in the school at inception and also at the present time. They include:

- Limited understanding and poor enlightenment of the nature of guidance and counselling
- Non-definitive role of counsellors,
- Insufficient provision of human and material resources to aid the effectiveness of guidance and counselling,
- Insufficient time allocation for guidance and counselling in the school.
- Overburdening of counsellors with other school work and assignment like being subject teachers.

### **Way forward to Guidance and counselling in Nigeria**

From 1959 till date, guidance and counselling have evolved into a chain of knowledge with its inclusion in teacher education as highlighted in the National Policy on Education in 1981 and as a choice course of study with the University of Ibadan establishing the first Indigenous Department of guidance and counselling in 1975. Despite the steady progress in the growth of guidance and counselling in Nigeria, it is beset with challenges in attaining the best service delivery due to inappropriate attention paid to the modalities in reaching its set objectives. As such guidance counsellors in Nigerian secondary schools are bedecked with other teaching responsibilities that hinder them from attending to the needs of students for their optimal success in school life. To this end, the following are proposed for effective guidance counselling in Nigeria:

- a. Creation of an office of Vice-Principal Counselling in the school cadre to cater strictly for this purpose.
- b. Enlightenment of parents, teachers and school heads on the roles of school guidance counsellors.
- c. Provision of a well-equipped counselling office to provide premium confidential guidance of students.
- d. Ensure regular and adequate supervision of the activities of the school guidance counsellor aside from the normal school supervision of schools.
- e. Non-utilisation of Counsellors as class/subject teachers.
- f. Provision of funds and other resources to aid efficient guidance counselling services in schools.





## Conclusion

The Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles are on record as the first set of sisters in Nigeria and their role in girl-child and women education remains outstanding in producing credible citizens for the Nigerian nation and ensuring posterity of dedicated and formidable women in all spheres of life. Their step-by-step discernment in the formation of the girl-child further directed their choice of presenting the right form of education at the right time. They went from establishing the first female primary school in the later part of the 19th century to opening vocational schools to women who were differently talented in skill acquisition and then establishment of secondary schools. These sisters to date manage schools and health care facilities all over Nigeria to meet the emergent needs of the female folk in the ever-changing specifics of the 21st century. St. Theresa's College Oke-Ado Ibadan and other schools founded by the Sisters in Nigeria still maintain their status of discipline and reliable standards.

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