

**A WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRINCIPAL, ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE, OTUKPO,  
REV. FR. OCHAI, A. AUGUSTINE, AT THE 79<sup>TH</sup> CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF  
THE PATRON SAINT OF THE COLLEGE – ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.**

The Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Otukpo and Proprietor of our College, The Most Revd. Michael E. Apochi,

His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Benue State, Revd. Fr Hyacinth Alia and his deputy, Dr. Sam Odeh, MNI.

The members of the State Executive Council,

His Royal Majesty, the Och’Idoma (V) Agaba Idu, Dr. Elaigwu Odogbo John, and distinguished Royal persons here present,

Our distinguished guests and invitees.

His Excellency, Senator David Mark.

His Excellency, Senator representing Benue South senatorial district, Comrade Abba Morro.

Distinguished Hon. Lady Blessing Onuh, representing Otukpo/Ohimini Federal Constituency, National Assembly, Abuja.

The Commissioner of Education & Knowledge Economy, Rev Dr Fredrick Ikyaan.

The Education Secretary, Catholic Diocese of Otukpo, Rev Fr. Dr Francis Atama.

All clergy and Religious,

My Lords, Spiritual and Temporal.

All distinguished Old Boys; Sets, Branches and Groups.

Staff and Students, St. Francis College, Otukpo.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with immense joy that I welcome you to this celebration of the feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of this premier College. The celebration this year which marks the 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of our College is quite a unique one considering the great hopes and joys it brings as we have the privilege of meeting very unique and highly esteemed personalities, more particularly our very advanced Old Boys; those worthy enough to be called ancestors to us the younger generation of the Old Boys; your presence means so much to us and we say welcome home seniors.

This celebration offers us a number of opportunities, namely, to interact and celebrate, to humbly appreciate all those who think well and good of the college, and appeal to you all for more support and assistance in the different areas of our dear college we find ourselves beneath and behind the capacity of fixing our lacks.

To interact and celebrate: knowing this celebration brings together trans-generational persons is a privilege none would take for granted. The Christian holy book says, “*how good and how pleasant to live [and celebrant] together in unity as brethren*” (Psalm 133:1). Also considering the degree of persons and personalities here, Chinua Achebe’s quote in *Things Fall Apart* comes

to mind, *“A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast do not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather in the moonlight village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen [Franciscans or Assisi Boys] to do so”*. And in the words of the father of the prodigal son to his eldest son, *“it is right that we celebrate...”* (Luke 15: 32).

To appreciate everyone: may I spare you the stress of repeating the protocol mentioned earlier. I appreciate everyone for the invaluable gift of your presence and support. Perhaps to add to the lists of protocol for appreciation are all the principals and significant persons that have worked here; Rev. Fr. John Enright (1944 - 1948), Rev. Bro. Benignus O Brien (1948 - 1958), Rev. Bro. Mel Minnock (1958 - 1969), Rev Bro. Bernardine (1969 - 1974), Sir Bernard Omaiyi (1974 - 1976), Mr. Regis Kanangatherie (1976 - 1982), Mr. Augustine Odumu (1982 - 1984), Sir Benjamin Ugalahi (1984 - 1992), Sir Benedict Onyilo (1992 - 1998), Sir Nicodemus Elaigwu (1998 - 2004), Mr. Michael Odeh ( Ag. 2004 - 2004), Rev Fr. Emmanuel Adai (2004 - 2021) and my human self who took over in September 2021.

With great feelings of admiration, respect, love, and gratitude, I appreciate the overwhelming love and support of the Old Boys, especially since the inception of this young administration about two years ago. In no order of hierarchy of importance, I and indeed the school appreciate the ever vibrant SAFOBA Port Harcourt branch and her supportive patron – Chief, Engr. Dr. Innocent Akuve, Sets 82, 83, 92, 96, 98, other sets and branches that I may not recall at the moment, not forgetting the home branch. I appreciate Barr. Patrick Ameh (Set 87), Mike Ochoche and Sule Ameh who sponsored two students’ SSCE registration a couple of years ago. I appreciate also and greatly the rise of the concerned group of Old Boys headed by my very revered Snr and father, Godwin Alumuku – The SAFOBA REBIRTH.

To a worthy son and product of St Francis College, whose love and show of interest is just amusing, Chief, Barr. Godwin Obla (SAN). To overcome the shame of speechlessness before a distinguish assembly such as this which your numerous projects can cause; I appreciate you very profoundly for the renovation and equipping of the three science labs; Chemistry, Physics and Biology. The ongoing renovation of the college dormitories, the provision of marching bands, your donation of Five Million Naira to the school for indigent students under the direct monitoring of the proprietor, the provision of pathway solar lights to the college as well as solar powered inverter, your other projects awaiting execution; the renovation of students’ bathroom and provision of new and decent toilet for the students, upgrading our college sports facilities to the best standard and in your words, not to be compared with any school’s in Benue state, and your desire to upgrade the school to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century academic institute by providing ICT. I use this opportunity to appreciate you also for the provision of a kidney centre sited at the Federal University of Health Sciences Otukpo Teaching Hospital, former General Hospital, the new hostel built at Wesley High School, Otukpo and other projects I may not be aware of or mention here.

Finally, to appeal for support and assistance: to all our friends and well wishers, this college will be 80 years in the next celebration of October 2024. As we appreciate God for the success and growth so far, we cannot deny that we still have so much to accomplish, and so I sincerely and passionately appeal especially to every past student of this school as the present principal and interim national president of the St. Francis College Old Boys Association – SAFOBA. Permit me to itemize our needs and areas we genuinely need help; poor remuneration of our staff (lack of motivation), we wish to give scholarship to best pupils in some primary schools will lead to getting the best brains, thereby increasing academic competition among our students and consequently in other areas of the school life like sports, entrepreneur, scholarship also to distinguished graduating students etc. Assistance to support students' welfare, renovation of classrooms, landscaping of the compound, provision of modern teaching aids like projectors in our labs and auditorium with ICT facilities, lack of good sports facilities and equipments, decent toilet, we need more water reservoirs to enable us harvest water during raining seasons, refurbishment of the college Cultural & Creative Arts studio, Entrepreneurship workshop, Animal Husbandry & Agricultural Science Lab.

To the Old Boys worldwide, I exalt us all in the words of the Holy Quran, to hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and not become divided... (Quran 3:103) as we look forward to December 29<sup>th</sup> for our National Reunion. May I correct this erroneous notion among the younger generation of St. Francis College Old Boys that one becomes a member of the Old Boys National body only after about ten years of graduation; this is not true as you become an Old Boy just as you drop you pen after SSCE.

I renew my appreciation once again to everyone and wish everyone a happy celebration of this august occasion.

Thank you and God bless you.