

Welcome Address Delivered On The Occasion Of The Homecoming And Centenary Celebration Of The Methodist College Uzuakoli And The Commemoration Of 100 Years Of Secondary School In Igboland And The South East Of Nigeria

On behalf of the immediate community of Methodist College Uzuakoli comprising the old students under the umbrella of Uzuakoli Methodist College Old Boys Association (UMCOBA), the present students, parents, and Staff of the of Methodist College Uzuakoli, UMCOBA, it is my utmost pleasure and privilege to welcome you to this citadel of learning and history, which makes all of us proud.

Your Excellency, as you would already have observed, we are most elated to have you in our midst today as the Special Guest of Honour, on this memorable occasion of the centenary celebrations of the establishment of Methodist College Uzuakoli. It is an event that also marks the 100th year anniversary of the commencement of secondary school education in Igboland and in the South East of Nigeria.

We are gratified that the experiment, which the Methodist Primitive Mission kicked off in 1923, has today become a great story of success and advantage to society. The Primitive Methodist Mission came into South East Nigeria in 1870 and in its maiden Synod in Eastern Nigeria, the Council took the first step towards introducing secondary school education in the region. It took a very important resolution which led to the establishment of the Uzuakoli Institute, which was eventually renamed Methodist College Uzuakoli. According to the Council's declarations, 'Our object is in general terms, the spread of specifically Christian education for the African as an African. Stated more generally, it is an attempt to provide education not merely as an independent good, or as a means to material ends, but also in definite relation to his spiritual foundations of life as exhibited in the teaching of Jesus Christ, and at the same time to relate the instruction to African life so that the product may be truly African as the native material provided.'

Our training within these walls focuses on Christian Education. Its emphasis is on discipline, honesty, hard work and overall personality development. These are the factors that make a nation great, and it is therefore little wonder that over time, Methodist College Uzuakoli has provided a formidable pool of human resources for society. It is on record that this College has produced her fair share of eminent Nigerians, whose contributions have been acknowledged by all. A partial list of the alumni of this College includes such names as Dr Michael Okpara, was a product of the College, and so were Udo Udoma, Edwin Ogbu, Clement Isong, Mark Chijioke, Anezi Okoro, the famous dermatologist and novelist, O.C. Nwana, the Ogans, Bob Ogbuagu, Rufus Obi the renowned pharmacist, Justus O. Paul, Justice Igbo Chekwes, Pharm Dick Onuigbo, Rev L. Utaegbunam, Navy Capt Christopher Osondu, Nnamdi Stability Egbukichi, a living football legend, Rtd, Reginald Abbey Hart, our beloved President Emeritus, the Opokos, the Kannos, the Achinivus, the Ogans, the Acharas, the Nnamanis, the Onokalas, the Onyeukwus, and the Nkanginiemes. The College has also produced several

notable Old Girls who have also made huge contributions to the society. These include Nnenna Iheukwumere, Ojiugo Chukwu, Nnenna Nkanginieme, Leticia (nee Onwukeme), Rose Onyejeli, and Ngozi Atuonwu.

Your Excellency, here in our midst today are some of the octogenarians who were once students of this great College, and who are being remembered and honoured here today by the College and UMCOPA. We also have a project called the Uzumeco 100@100, which will recognise and honour those considered the top 100 alumni of the College. On the 23rd of this month, the College will join the Uzuakoli community in the finale of her Ila Oso Uzuakoli festival. It will be an opportunity for the College and the Old Boys to show their love and gratitude to the Uzuakoli Community for being such wonderful hosts and landlords.

Your faith and support for the Uzumeco experiment cannot be better demonstrated than by the number of alumni of the College who are in your indefatigable executive team that is making Abia truly proud. There are at least seven members of your inner cabinet who received their secondary school education in this College.

Your Chief Security Officer, who is here with us today, is an old boy of this college. So also are your Hon. Commissioner for Trade and Industry, your General Managers for the rejuvenation of Aba and Umuahia, your Special Adviser on Agriculture and also your Special Adviser for Monitoring and Evaluation.

It goes even further than that, the husband of your Hon. Commissioner for Education is an alumnus of this institution and the father of your Principal Secretary and Chief Strategy Officer, also schooled here. I am sure there are several more among the rank and file of your administration.

Your Excellency, we are mindful of your passion for education, and you have not hidden the fact that it made all the difference in your own life. That is also true for most of us here today. The secondary schools that we attended helped to mould our lives and we believe that what we owe the young ones coming after us, is to give them the opportunity to use quality education to also improve their own lives and the society in which they will live and thrive.

Methodist College Uzuakoli is a metaphor for the society in which we live in. Just like Abia state itself, it is in the throes of a new beginning, with you as the divine captain of the ship. The same dereliction that afflicted the entire Aba state did not avoid the College. The Nigeria Biafra war ravaged the College and things got worse when the Higher School (advanced level) section was scrapped without justification. Furthermore, the DNA of the College was changed significantly.

We are now in the process of reviving the College and we use this unique opportunity to request that you join us, in your personal and official capacities to help us achieve our ambitious mission. We have a new masterplan for the College and we propose to work closely with the Methodist Church, the Abia State government, and well-meaning individuals and

institutions in the society to enable us restore the College and give our children a place that will give them the quality of education that you and us enjoyed during our time. We believe that you are reinventing education in Abia State and we earnestly exhort you to put Methodist College, Uzuakoli at the vortex of your development programme. Our old boys and girls are willing and able to be part of your programme, which we believe will be a resounding success.

We have a masterplan which will help guide our potential benefactors on what the needs of the College would be in terms of infrastructure.

We welcome you and your distinguished entourage as you visit our great Alma Mater, Methodist College Uzuakoli, and we are also highly gratified that you have granted us the wish to plant the Centenary tree, which not only commemorates the establishment of our beloved College, but also the 100th anniversary of secondary school education in the South East of Nigeria.

We wish you and all participants safe journey back to your various destinations.

Ugochukwu A. Okoroafor, DOB, mni, fcs
National President
Uzuakoli Methodist College Old Boys Association (UMCOBA)

10th December 2023