

## VIVIAN UCHECHI OGU (1995-2009)

The striking heroism in the story of Vivian is in the remarkable way in which she expressed her Christian faith, having extraordinary influence on the lives of others from the tender age of nine and the courage with which she put into practice what she had been preaching when the opportunity came at the age of fourteen, opting to be killed rather than to be defiled.

Vivian Uchechi Ogu was born in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1995, the second of four children of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Ogu. The family was one of the most dedicated at St. Paul's Catholic parish on Airport Road in Benin City, and her father was among those asked to organize the laity of Ascension Catholic Church, a neighboring Mass center at the Nigerian Air Force barracks that was just down the road.

Vivian was baptized at St. Paul Catholic Church, Benin City on July 1, 1995, and she received her First Holy Communion at the same parish on March 21, 2005. She was in the preparatory class for the sacrament of confirmation, which was slated for 2010, at the time of her death.

In academics, Vivian was excellent and she consistently remained at the top of her class from her primary school until her death in secondary school. She combined her academic prowess with a self-determined goal to live an exemplary Christian life, a life she felt would inspire others to greater spirituality and love for humanity so as to give glory to God. Vivian attended the Nigeria Air Force Women Association School for her Kindergarten education. She then attended the Air Force Primary School, where she distinguished herself academically. For her secondary education,

Vivian attended the Greater Tomorrow Secondary School, also in Benin City. At the time of her death, she was in Senior Secondary II, dreaming and working towards becoming a lawyer so she could fight the cause of the poor and downtrodden, especially widows and orphans or, as she told one of her animators, an aeronautic engineer, so she could prove to the world that it was not just a profession exclusive to the male population. Vivian represented her school in many activities. She excelled in Mathematics, which was her favorite subject, and represented her school in the local “Cow-Bell Mathematics Competition.” For extracurricular activities, Vivian joined an interdenominational group where she held the post of Assistant Prayer leader, a post she held until her death. Her hobbies were, reading, singing, and dancing.

Her spiritual journey received new energy thanks to the Charismatic Catholic Renewal in which she began to participate with her parents. As she grew older, she took part in the Bible study courses of the “Joy Group.” She lived out her faith among her friends by exchanging advice and experiences. She was a steward in her class and played prominent role in the yearly Teen Camp meetings which began in 2007.

St. Paul’s Church encouraged the participation of children and young people in the Sunday Eucharist by offering a special Bible activity for them during the Liturgy of the Word and then having them join their parents for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. After Mass, the children received further teachings from the parish catechists. It was here that Vivian, at the age of nine years, began to publicly demonstrate her zeal and courage in speaking to other children on the dignity of purity and virginity. Vivian joined the Sunday School Community as it was known then and later the choir. She was quite young but committed. She took part in all special events in the Church such as the yearly Children Day Celebration, the Annual Children Mission Day and the Christmas Carol Service as well as the end of year thanksgiving where the children are given the responsibility of organizing liturgical activities for the day. She took part in almost all the activities in the

parish community as much as her age then would allow. For liturgical celebrations, she would always take either the reading or prayer of the faithful.

After joining the children's choir in the parish her family started attending in 2005, Vivian found that the choir director was frequently absent from its practices and activities, and soon she had informally assumed the role of choir leader. She wanted so much to organize a skillful and disciplined choir that she developed, with her father's help, a formal statute instituting it. The proposal was approved by the parish council and thus the children's choir was officially established in the parish for the first time. Over the next four years, under Vivian's guidance, the choir grew from a small group of about twenty children to nearly sixty children at the time of her death. This choir frequently won first place in the various musical competitions organized by the Society of Holy Childhood, from 2007 right up to the most recent ones. With her deep conviction and love for God and her companions, Vivian proposed the idea of periodic sacrifice. She encouraged the children to engage in various acts of mortification for salvation, for their personal conversion, and for the material and spiritual needs of the neediest children in the parish and the world.

It is therefore not surprising that when the Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood (PAHC) was inaugurated in the parish of St. Paul in 2006, Vivian was unanimously elected as the first president. During her tenure, she worked tirelessly to make the parish's PAHC chapter second to none in the archdiocese in terms of carrying out works and prayers. Among the projects that she coordinated there was, on the occasion of Children's Day in 2008, the collection of funds to cover the medical expenses of some disabled children at the Central Hospital of Benin City, and also to meet the needs of some children from the orphanages in Benin City. Two institutions that benefited from this generosity were the orphanages in Edo and Oronsaye. For Children's Day 2009, Vivian mobilized the entire parish to establish a solidarity fund for the less fortunate parishioners. Vivian was the official representative of the parish during the meetings and activities

of PAHC in the archdiocese. She was also the first member of to contribute to the creation and circulation of the archdiocesan PAHC newsletter, called “Friends of Jesus.” Vivian loved reading the Holy Scriptures and asking for explanations from her priests and teachers concerning the teachings of the Church. Moved by her love for the Word of God, she had decided to commit himself to writing her understanding of the Gospels. She had arrived at chapter sixteen of the Gospel of St. Matthew by the time she was killed.

Through the archdiocesan training courses organized for children by the PAHC, Vivian became aware of the story of Saint Maria Goretti. She would continually retell the story of her favorite saint when she invited his companions to a life of faith and friendship with Jesus and instructed them on the value of virginity. With her heroic death, Vivian offered a concrete example of this teaching.

On Sunday, November 15, 2009, while she was at home in the evening, armed thieves came and robbed her family and then took Vivian and her sister out of town to a rural area. The thieves tried to rape her, but when she vigorously refused, they shot and killed her. On November 27, 2009, after the Mass of Christian Burial in St. Paul’s Church, her body was transported to her hometown of Aboh Mbase for burial. Having learned the news of her heroic death, the government of Edo State granted the land where she was martyred to the Archdiocese of Benin City. Two years later, the local government council of Ikpoba Okha officially named the road on which she was killed, “Vivian Ogu”.

Since 2010, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Benin City gather every year on November 15 at the place she was killed for an annual memorial of Vivian Ogu. On March 29, 2014, the Archbishop of Benin City, Augustine Obiora Akubeze, inaugurated the Vivian Ogu Society, with the task of making known the story of her exemplary life, preserving the land where she was killed, collecting testimonies of people about her virtues and about potential miracles, for the promotion of the cause for her possible beatification.