

or anybody else, let him book 'Imo Hotel, Owerri State.' I pray that the Spirit of God will bless you always."

A third letter, this time addressed to "Council of Twelve," arrived at Church headquarters about the same time as the first two missionary couples arrived in Nigeria. In it, Anthony Obinna showed evidence of his reading background and laid his faith on the line: "Dr. Karl G. Maeser continued writing and the Church was brought to his people. There are many people who wanted the church and it was granted. Nigeria has an open door for religious denominations. What could hinder this church from having foot hold here? Did Christ not say 'Go ye and teach all nations?'. . . We here are the true sons of God, but colour makes no difference in the service of Our Heavenly Father and Christ. The Spirit of God calls us to abide by this church and there is nothing to keep us out."

He added a note at the end: "N.B. For eight years now -- 1971-1978 our Faith is still on trial. With God on our side we must succeed." How right he was!

Significant Firsts

Brother Obinna had continued to press for Church literature. When Ted first entered the room that served as Anthony's office, he was pleased to see there a copy of *Gospel Principles*, the new simplified manual for branches and small groups. As President Faust's counselor, Ted had sent copies in late October to about twenty known leaders in the International Mission. Anthony was one of those, and the marked places in the open book on his desk showed that he had already read about half the book. On Obinna's office wall, Ted noticed pictures of President Lee and the apostles of the Church, with Apostle Boyd K. Packer as the newest. A picture of Anthony's brother Francis was also displayed. Although Ted had never met Anthony Obinna, he felt impressed that here was a leader who had prepared both his family and himself for full membership in the Church. After a satisfying meeting with the Obinnas, Brother Mabey agreed that a baptism would be in order on a return trip from Enugu, where they were expected.

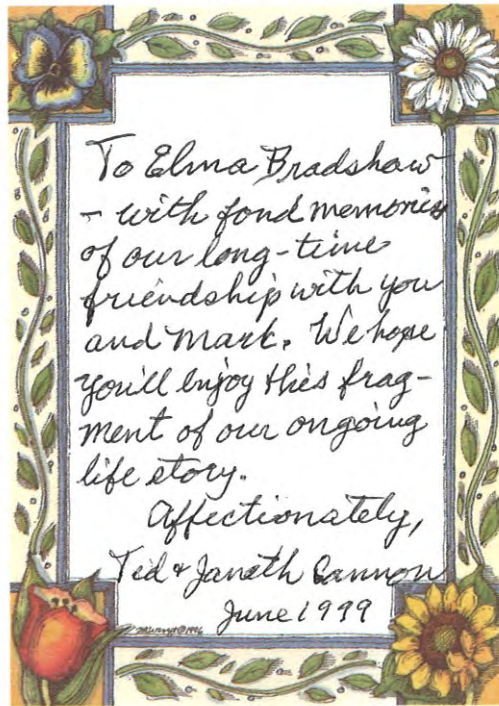
Three days later, on 21 October 1978, the Cannons and Mabeys returned from Enugu with their new friends the Knudsens and the Bowns, to carry out the first official group baptism and organization of the first all-black branch

of the Church in Africa. While Brothers Cannon, Knudsen, and Bown interviewed the candidates for baptism and Brother Mabey met with some local dignitaries, their wives gathered the waiting women and children for Ardis Knudsen to teach them "I Am a Child of God", using the newly published song booklet *Hymns and Children's Songs*. It was a heart-touching experience to hear them singing enthusiastically, "Lead me, guide me, walk beside me. Help me find the way. Teach me all that I must do to live with Him some day."

The baptisms took place in a secluded, tree-shaded pool of the Ekeonumiri River, where the surrounding bushes served as dressing rooms and the small, sandy border was the meeting place. Four handmade white robes were passed on to waiting candidates as the baptisms proceeded. In the absence of any official forms, Sister Cannon, who had been set apart by Brother Mabey as the clerk, recorded in her journal the names of those being baptized and confirmed, with the initials of the officiators, including those of A. Bruce Knudsen and David N. Bown. Of the nineteen names she recorded, ten male and six female last names were "Obinna." Years later, a non-Mormon sociologist, Dr. Rodney Stark, would be impressed with the family pattern evident in the early growth of the Church--among the Smiths and Youngs, for example--and would credit much of the Church's subsequent growth to that pattern. (Dennis Lythgoe, "LDS, a model for Christianity study," *Deseret News*, 27 June 1998, E2.) The baptism of the Obinna family typified that kind of growth for the Church in West Africa. But family growth would not be the only type, as the future would show.

The Aboh Branch was organized the same day as the baptism, with Brother Obinna as president, his brothers Francis and Raymond as counselors, and his wife Fidelia as president of the Relief Society. In the organization meeting, Brother Obinna expressed a sensitivity to the obvious fact that all these officers were members of his own family. Brother Mabey assured him that they had been chosen by inspiration and should be sustained as such by the congregation. As indeed they were, unanimously.

The four American couples returned to Enugu that night knowing they had taken part in a historic occasion. Two days later, they shared a Thanksgiving feast hosted by Ardis and Bruce, with special gratitude for their success together in Aboh. The thoughtful Knudsens shared the celebration with two additional American couples as their guests, the Keslers and the Lloyds, and thrilled the two missionary couples with the hope that a house in Enugu might



To Elma Bradshaw
- with fond memories
of our long-time
friendship with you
and Mark. We hope
you'll enjoy this frag-
ment of our ongoing
life story.

Affectionately,
Ted & Janeth Cannon
June 1999



TOGETHER

--

A LOVE STORY

BY

**Janath Russell Cannon
&
Edwin Q. Cannon Jr.**



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