

Seminarians journey to America

By Erik Zygmunt

Josephite seminarians Alexander Lema and Justus Ihemawulotu made the journey from Nigeria earlier this year and are now continuing their formation at The Catholic University of America and St. Joseph's Seminary, both in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Ihemawulotu, 25, became interested in the priesthood as a young boy, later thought he would become a human rights activist, and finally settled on both.

"I wanted to advocate for those in prison," he said.

He saw injustice occur while he was growing up in the Nigerian city of Owerri in Imo State. Friends of his or other young people would run afoul of the local police simply by walking at night, he said, which "is not an offense in our constitution."

Those who came from families with means would make a phone call and secure immediate release, while others suffered harsher consequences.

Mr. Ihemawulotu continued to practice his faith, and one day, at Mass, found himself observing the celebrant from a new perspective. "Justus, why have you forgotten this?" was the question.

"What?" was Mr. Ihemawulotu's initial response but the query did not leave him alone and eventually he answered:

"God, if you want me to do this, I will give it a try."

He said he learned more about the Josephites during a vocations retreat.

By the time he was interviewed – a key step in the selection process for aspirants to the society – he was "in love" with the Josephites' social justice-oriented mission, he said.

"I said, 'I would love to do it! If it pleases you, so be it,'" Mr. Ihemawulotu said.

Mr. Lema, the other seminarian, is also 25. He is from Bodo in Nigeria's Rivers State.

He learned about the Josephites at a young age; his home parish, St. Patrick Catholic Church, was run by the Missionary Society of St. Paul, which has long partnered with the Josephites.

As a 13-year-old, Mr. Lema met Josephite seminarians at his parish who were home on break.

During his high school years, his interest in pursuing religious life grew but there was no pull toward a specific religious group. Nevertheless, he came across an application to the Josephites and completed it.

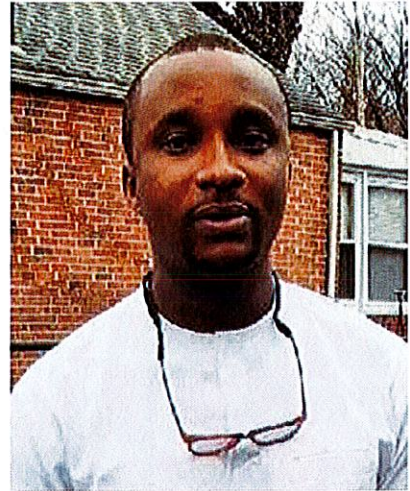
Like Mr. Ihemawulotu, the more he learned, the more interested he became.

"When I read about the society – about how it was involved with civil rights and the pro-life movement – I liked that," he said. "I became prepared to commit to it."

Both Mr. Lema and Mr. Ihemawulotu are settling into classes at Catholic U and life at St. Joseph's seminary.

Mr. Lema enjoys playing soccer – a common interest among the Nigerian Josephites – and listening to music.

Mr. Ihemawulotu also enjoys soccer but especially table tennis.



Justus Ihemawulotu



Alexander Lema


**'God, if you want
me to do this, I
will give it a try.'**