

Women form Catholic group to blend cultural diversity

The April 29 inauguration of a Nigerian woman's group is expected to attract about 40 natives of the African nation to St. Matthew, Northwood, in an effort to foster moral and Christian family values and help new immigrants adjust to life in the United States.

The women of the Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community have been preparing for the 1:30 p.m. foundational ceremony of the Catholic Woman's Organization for the past two years.

"I think we're all very anxious to finally get this off the ground," said Julie Nnadozie, chairwoman of the CWO inaugural committee, during an April 14 planning meeting at the Perry Hall residence of the group's president, Patience Ekeocha. "It's been a lot of work, but it's all going to be worthwhile."

The women - adorned in traditional Nigerian garb, complete with towering gold head ties, white lace blouses and gold-wrapped shirts - unanimously elected St. Matthew's Pastor Father Joseph Muth as the group's official chaplain.

"While I trust that you will keep your culture, faith and attitude alive in this organization, my hope is you will help other Nigerian woman make the transition to the culture of this country," Father Muth said. "It's important that you all help the new immigrants weather the storm of adjusting to a new culture and to help them be comfortable in their new surroundings."

There are about 40 Nigerian-born women from all over the Baltimore area in the new CWO who are parishioners at Catholic churches throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Some have lived in the U.S. for more than a quarter century, while others have been here only a short time, said Ms. Ekeocha, who has lived in the area for the past 28 years, but travels back to her homeland twice a year to develop and promote the fight against AIDS in that nation.

For many years the NICC has met at St. Matthew on the last Sunday of each month to hear Mass in the Igbo language – one of three official languages spoken in Nigeria – and the liturgy is usually celebrated by a Nigerian Igbo priest.

The CWO will cultivate a lasting matriarchal community among Nigerian Catholic women and allow them to address the needs of their children, who are being raised in a U.S. culture by parents with strong ties to Nigerian customs, said Emily Olandu of Parkville, a parishioner of St. Mary of the Assumption, Govans, and a CWO officer.

The woman's non-profit group will meet the second Sunday of each month from 3 to 5:30 p.m. and will organize fundraising events and cultural awareness, said Ms. Ekeocha, a parishioner of St. Matthew.

"Together – in faith and love – we will all be able to grow and move forward in our lives here," she said, "while maintaining our Nigerian heritage."