

# Ukomadu

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Father Oliver Ochieze of Fairfield Bay told *Arkansas Catholic* in 2013 that he remembers the warm welcome he got when he arrived in the diocese with Father Ukomadu. It was September 1999 but Father Ochieze said, "It was cold for us."

When he arrived Father Ukomadu was named the associate pastor at St. John Church in Hot Springs as well as the sacramental minister at St. Mary Church in Arkadelphia and St. John Church in Malvern. In 2003 he was assigned to be the pastor in Arkadelphia and Malvern. In 2011 he moved to Cherokee Village and Horseshoe Bend.

Current and former parishioners remembered Father Ukomadu as a good listener, an intelligent and organized administrator and for the joy with which he lived his life.

One of Father Ukomadu's funeral services coincided with the 25th anniversary observance of St. Mary of the Mount Church in Horseshoe Bend. In fact, he died on the actual anniversary date, according to parishioner Dick LeMere. While his untimely death cast a shadow on the celebration, LeMere said there was little doubt that the event would come off as planned, especially given the degree to which Father Ukomadu had been involved in its planning.

About 70 gathered for the May 26 banquet, or as LeMere put it, "almost all of our parishioners," plus special guests.

"The mood was definitely bitter-sweet," said LeMere, who chaired the event's organizing committee. "We debated whether we should do the event or not, but we decided he would have wanted it to go on. It really was an uplifting thing, it was what we needed."

LeMere said Father Ukomadu's faithfulness endeared him to the

congregation and his organizational skills were impressive, particularly facing the challenge of staying on top of two parishes' activities.

"He made a real effort to stay in contact," he said. "He always seemed to have a goal for our church and not get sidetracked from it. And, he was an excellent priest in the way he celebrated Mass. He was very intelligent."

Paula Standridge, a parishioner of St. John Church in Hot Springs, said her family practically adopted Father Ukomadu during his time in Hot Springs and after his reassignment to nearby Arkadelphia and Malvern. In fact, he called her the night he died to compliment her on an *Arkansas Catholic* article she wrote, a gesture that was typical of his nature, she said.

"The thing I will remember is that he was full of joy," she said. "He had a laugh that was more like a giggle and whenever we were around one another, you just lived

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## Deacon Bob Standridge

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Standridge's husband, Deacon Bob Standridge, served at Father Ukomadu's funeral Masses at Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock and St. Michael Church in Cherokee Village as well as the vigil service in Horseshoe Bend. He called Father Ukomadu "vital" to his completing his studies for the diaconate from both an academic and an encouragement standpoint.

"He was always my biggest fan," he said. "He'd always encourage me and tell me that I would be a good deacon. I learned a lot from him; probably the biggest thing I learned was how to listen to peo-

ple with sincerity. Father Linus demonstrated that to me and it's something I try to emulate in my ministry."

A vigil service was held at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock May 23. The first of two funeral liturgies was concelebrated at the Cathedral at May 24, followed by a reception in McDonald Hall. Father Ukomadu's body was transported to Horseshoe Bend May 25 and a vigil service was prayed that night at St. Mary of the Mount in Horseshoe Bend.

A second funeral was concelebrated at St. Michael Church in Cherokee Village May 26. Father Ukomadu's body then was sent to Orlu, Nigeria, for burial.