

4 of 4 DOCUMENTS

Chicago Tribune

**October** 6, 2006 Friday  
Chicago Final Edition

## Keeping the faith in a new land; Nigerian immigrants feel right at home in Rogers Park church with ties to Africa

**BYLINE:** By Emily Stone, Special to the Tribune

**SECTION:** METRO ; ZONE C; Pg. 11

**LENGTH:** 872 words

When Ola Hafolayan, his wife and three children emigrated from Nigeria in 2002, one of the first places they went was a small, storefront church in Rogers Park.

Members of the Holy Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, mostly fellow Nigerians, offered the family a place to stay, bought them groceries and helped Hafolayan find a job as a taxi driver, he said.

The church, linked to one of the largest religious groups in Nigeria, also looked like home to Hafolayan, with its members clad in white robes, the women with their heads covered, and lots of joyful noise during services.

This combination of community and familiarity attracts people to the C and S Movement church, one of two in the city. It's a place for new immigrants to feel at home and for Nigerian-Americans to celebrate and hold onto their African roots.

"Even though they don't know you, you understand the tradition. You have a lot in common," church member Alex Ogoke said of his first visit. "You're not feeling like a total stranger or like you're lost."

The larger Cherubim and Seraphim Church was founded in 1925 in Nigeria by Moses Orimolade Tunolase after he reported receiving divine revelations. In Africa there are many similar church movements founded by Africans, not missionaries--Christian churches with no organizational connection to Western denominations.

For this reason, African immigrants are more likely to join an immigrant-founded church than are immigrants from many other parts of the world, according to Fred Kniss, a Loyola University sociology professor who has studied immigrant religious practices in Chicago.

A Latin American Catholic, for example, can easily find a Catholic church here. But a Nigerian who was a C and S member at home is not going to find his church unless it was founded by a fellow immigrant.

That is why Idowu Connell Akande founded the Rogers Park church. He moved to America to attend college in 1977 and tried out different churches, but none felt right. He'd gone to a C and S seminary in Nigeria as a lay student and decided to start a church here.

It began with a few people in his North Side apartment in 1983 and moved a couple times to increasingly larger spaces before settling at the current location, 7066 N. Clark St. With about 120 members, the church draws 75 people on a good Sunday, said Akande, the pastor.

His church also is the district headquarters for other C and S churches in the region. There are more than 20 such churches in the country, including the other Chicago church at 4850 N. Sawyer Ave. in Albany Park.

Akande explains the church's practices--such as removing one's shoes, separating men and women during worship and

the occasional speaking in tongues--by flipping quickly through a well-worn Bible to cite specific Scripture.

"That's what the Bible says; I didn't write it," he said.

Members follow a strict, literal interpretation of the Bible and believe that everything they do must be motivated by a desire to serve God, Akande said. They have several outreach groups to this end, including one that assists the children of jail inmates and another that worked with a social service agency to help a Bosnian immigrant family.

In Nigeria, people go to church seven days a week for hours at a time, Akande said. That's not possible in America, where work and school demand so much time. Still, there are five services a week at the church, with the Sunday thanksgiving service as the most lively.

"This place is booming with noise," Akande said.

Sunday services showcase the church's choir, which sings rousing hymns in English and Yoruba and is accompanied by a full drum kit. Many of the roughly 50 members attending on a recent Sunday swayed, clapped and sang along. A couple of remarkably well-behaved babies, also in white, appeared not to mind.

After Akande's sermon, toward the end of the nearly three-hour service, a group of women passed a microphone around to say what they were thankful for that week, which ranged from a healthy family to an accommodating tow-truck driver who passed by at just the right moment on Lake Shore Drive.

The service, conducted mostly in English, resembles many Protestant services with its heartfelt hallelujahs and Bible recitations, but the white robes, bare feet, covered heads and occasional Yoruba give it a distinctly African feel.

Such churches' particular feel is the result of African traditions being assimilated into Christianity, said **Jacob Olupona**, a Harvard Divinity School professor who studies indigenous African religions and is from Nigeria.

For example, women have a prominent role in C and S churches, and there is also a great deal of respect for elders, Olupona said. This is manifested in the Chicago church each time a younger person greets an elder and bows.

Hundreds of African-initiated churches have sprung up around the country as immigrants attempt to hold onto their heritage while adapting to their adopted home. In Africa, there is no distinction between the cultural and the religious, so immigrants satisfy both needs by joining these churches, Olupona said.

"They love America, but they don't think that should stop them from being African, from being Nigerians," Olupona said. "It's an extension of home."

**LOAD-DATE:** October 6, 2006

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**NOTES:** RELIGION

**GRAPHIC: PHOTO:** Gbemisola Pedro-Jesuyemi (center) prays during a service Sunday at the Holy Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church. The Rogers Park church is linked to one of the largest religious groups in Nigeria.

**PHOTO:** Daniel Leyeni leads a procession Sunday in the storefront church. Nigerian immigrants say the services give them a sense of connection with their homeland. Tribune photos by Kuni Takahashi

**PHOTOS 2**

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper

Copyright 2006 Chicago Tribune Company