News
Ministry



Sr. Olivia Umoh, a member of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, speaks with parents and children with disabilities Oct. 13, 2020, in a Catholic-run facility courtyard next to St. Peter Cathedral in Kumasi, Ghana. (CNS photo/courtesy SCP)



Damian Avevor

View Author Profile



Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Accra, Ghana — December 2, 2020

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A Nigerian nun working in Ghana urged parents of children with disabilities to see their situation as gift from God and not a curse.

Sr. Olivia Umoh, a member of the Daughters of Charity, said she understands it often is difficult to care for children with disabilities, but "I want to encourage parents that they are doing a special work for God, because these children belong to God and they are gracious in the sight of God." She spoke to Catholic News Service ahead of the Dec. 3 observance of International Day of Disabled Persons.

The day proclaimed in 1992 and observed annually aims to promote the rights and well-being of people with disabilities in all spheres of society and development and to increase awareness of the situation of people with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

Umoh is the director of Safe-Child Advocacy, a church-run center in Ghana's Kumasi Archdiocese. She said the center features children with disabilities and their parents or guardians each fall, when her congregation marks its founder's feast.

This year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, "there were over a hundred persons with disabilities in our courtyard" but the staff arranged sleeping mats, benches and plastic chairs to allow for social distancing and arrange for the needs of the guests.

The World Health Organization reports there are more than 600 million disabled people, 80% of whom live in low-income countries. In most developing countries, including Ghana, most people with disabilities are impoverished and marginalized, with little or no access to public health, education and other social services that would ideally support and protect them.

In Ghana, the 10% of the population with disabilities often are regarded as unproductive and incapable of contributing to society. There are no strong advocacy groups for them. Although their rights are guaranteed both by Ghana's Constitution and by International Conventions, in reality these provisions have offered them very little actual protection against discrimination.

With these challenges, Umoh reminded parents of vulnerable children that they "are your children, and as you take care of them, you are serving God in a special way."

She said caring for children with various forms and severity of disability is a moving experience that must not discourage parents and the children themselves. She also said anyone who mocks disabled children is mocking God.

Advertisement