

# Father Alphonsus and His Harmonica

“Father Alphonsus and his harmonica reached the man when nothing else could.”



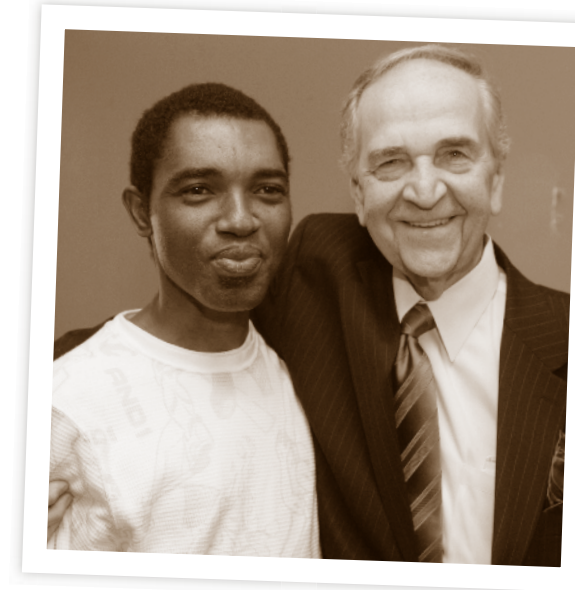
Father Alphonsus came to Calvary all the way from Nigeria for a training program. As the Director of Pastoral Care, I have made training chaplains a priority for Calvary Hospital, and I was pleased to welcome a fellow Nigerian to our hospital. At the time, I could never have guessed where this journey would lead Father Alphonsus.

Father Alphonsus

quickly became a Calvary favorite, not just among patients, but doctors, nurses, technicians, cooks, and administrators as well.

He brought with him a great sense of humor, a strong faith and a love of playing the harmonica.

One day, Father Alphonsus visited a patient who was angry and hurting. The patient refused to talk with any of our chaplains, or even his nurses. At first, Father Alphonsus



had no more luck than anyone else in reaching this man. Then, he decided that words were the wrong approach.

Without asking, he simply took out his harmonica and began to play.

The patient's eyes went wide, and after several minutes, he began to cry. When Father Alphonsus was done playing, the man confessed to him how frightened and angry he was. He was finally able to talk.

Mother Teresa famously said, "*We can do no great things, only small things with great love.*" Father Alphonsus understood this deeply.

When Father Alphonsus finished his training and returned to Nigeria, we missed him terribly.



Then came the very sad news that Father Alphonsus was diagnosed with terminal cancer. We begged him to come back to Calvary and give us all a chance to help him in the wonderful way he had

helped our patients.

When Father Alphonsus arrived, we gave him a gift—a beautiful new harmonica. He smiled from ear to ear, and promptly gave us all a concert. We should have known that even in his illness, Father Alphonsus would continue to be more of a chaplain than a patient.

Every day, when he was feeling well enough, he would treat us to his smile and his optimism. He would tell us not to worry. And he would express his joyous

faith through his music. To hear him was both uplifting and heartbreaking all at the same time.

When I heard that harmonica echoing in the halls, I knew he was feeling okay. There was nothing I wanted to hear more.

After several weeks at Calvary, Father Alphonsus felt well enough to return to Nigeria. Devoted to his flock right to the very end, he wanted to be with the people who loved him and needed him most.

It was a sad day at Calvary when we received the news that Father Alphonsus would never play the harmonica on this earth again.

I wish I could hear him again now. Though he came here to bring Calvary's methods back to his parish in Africa, he

came to us with a heart already filled with the tradition of acceptance and caring that is at the core of pastoral care here. And he taught us about living life with joy.

We held a memorial service for Father Alphonsus at Calvary that was widely attended by staff as well as family members of patients he had helped. When we

paused for a moment of silent prayer, we all felt we could hear the distant melody of Father Alphonsus's harmonica, drifting through the chapel. 🎷

By FATHER CHUX OKOCHI

