



**Opening Ceremony of St. Patrick's Irish College, Yola
Wednesday 7th October 2026 – Fr. Stephen Shields OSA**

Your Excellency Bishop Stephen, distinguished guests, brother Augustinians, members of the local community, teachers, parents and, most especially, the students of St Patrick's College,

I'm Fr Stephen Shields, the Mission Director for the Province of Ireland, and it is a great privilege, on behalf of Fr Paddy O'Reilly and the Irish Province of the Order of St Augustine, to be here with you today for the opening of St Patrick's College in Yola. I want to thank, in particular, your own Provincial, Fr Anthony Kanu, whom I've worked closely with over the past 4 years, for inviting me to this auspicious occasion.

It is a great privilege and joy, on behalf of the Irish Province of the Order of St Augustine, to be here in Yola for the opening of this wonderful new college.

Today is a day of celebration, but it is also a day of hope. A school is never simply a collection of classrooms and buildings. It is a place where lives are shaped, talents are discovered and young people are given the opportunity to build a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

The Irish Province is particularly pleased to have contributed financially to the development of St Patrick's College. We are grateful for the opportunity to support this important work and to play a small part in making this project a reality. Our support does not stop today, and we will continue to support you in your great work here.

However, our presence here is about much more than financial assistance. It is about a relationship between Augustinian communities that has developed over many decades.

The Irish and Nigerian Augustinians share a long and proud history. Indeed, Irish Augustinians have been present and working in Nigeria since 1938. For almost nine decades, generations of Irish Augustinians have shared in the life of the Church and the people of Nigeria through pastoral ministry, education and the establishment and development of Augustinian communities.

Over those years, friendships have formed, vocations have flourished, and a genuine partnership has developed between our two Augustinian traditions.

And today, that relationship is no longer simply a story of Irish Augustinians coming to Nigeria. The Nigerian Augustinian community has become a vital and growing part of the

Order worldwide. The relationship between our Provinces is one of mutual support, friendship and shared mission.

The name St Patrick's College is particularly appropriate.

St Patrick is, of course, Ireland's patron saint. He came to Ireland as a missionary and devoted his life to bringing the Gospel to its people. His story reminds us that education, faith and service are never confined by national boundaries. Patrick himself was a missionary who crossed borders, and his legacy continues to connect people across the world.

And alongside Patrick stands St Augustine, the father and teacher of our Order.

Augustine was born here in Africa, in North Africa, many centuries ago. His journey of faith, his love of learning and his search for truth have inspired generations of Christians. For us as Augustinians, his message remains as relevant today as it was in the fifth century: seek the truth, love one another and build communities where people can grow together.

So it is fitting that an Irish Province has the privilege of supporting a college named after Patrick, while working alongside our Nigerian Augustinian brothers, whose patron and spiritual father is Augustine.

In many ways, this school brings together Ireland and Africa, Patrick and Augustine, past and future.

To the students of St Patrick's College, I would say: this school belongs to you. Make the most of the opportunities it offers. Work hard, ask questions, discover your talents and never be afraid to dream. Education is not simply about passing examinations. It is about becoming the best person you can be and discovering how you can use your gifts in the service of others.

To the teachers and staff, we thank you for accepting the important responsibility of forming these young people. You will influence not only what they know, but who they become.

And to our Augustinian brothers in Nigeria, we offer our congratulations and our continuing friendship and support. May this college become a lasting sign of what can be achieved when people work together in faith and generosity.

May St Patrick, patron of Ireland, and St Augustine, our father and teacher, watch over this college and all who learn and work here.

And may St Patrick's College, Yola, become a place of knowledge, faith, friendship, opportunity and hope for generations to come.

On behalf of the Irish Province of the Order of St Augustine, congratulations to you all. We are proud to share this day with you, and we look forward to seeing the wonderful things that will come from this new chapter in our shared Augustinian story.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.