



PAX Newspaper

...Peace on earth to men of goodwill

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Wisdom Corner

“
Success Is Not A
Destination,
It Is Not An Event
It Is A Process
”

Solemnity Of The Epiphany of The Lord: Gov. Umo Eno Visits Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese

- *Bishop Umoh Harps on Self-examination,
Forgiveness, Repentance and Reconciliation*

- *Gov. Eno Donates in support of CBCN
Hosting, describes the Catholic Church as
'orderly and disciplined', Says his
Administration is all-inclusive*

By Cosmas Essiet

In a move that once again reaffirms his avowed commitment towards running an all-inclusive government, devoid of religious, ethnic and political bias, the Akwa Ibom State Governor, Pastor Umo Eno PhD, earlier today, Sunday 5th January 2025, visited the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene, and worshipped at the St. Anne Cathedral, Ifuho.

The visit coincided with the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, the commemoration of the the first manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, represented by the Magi, and the presentation of gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and the manifestation of his divinity, as it occurred at his

baptism in the Jordan River and at his first miracle, at Cana in Galilee, had as the Chief Celebrant of the Mass, the Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese, His Lordship Most. Rev. Dr. Camillus Raymond Umoh.

In his homily, the Bishop laid credence to the significance of the Epiphany, noting that it reflects the manifestation of Christ to the entire universe irrespective of tribe and religion; "we celebrate God's initiative to break the walls of enmity and tribalism created by human beings, to unite us as one nation... God desires that we should live together as one, worshipping him in spirit and truth". He called on everyone to embrace the essence of the gift of

cont'd on page 2



**Ikpe Agog, As
Very. Rev. Fr. Stephen Udo
Celebrates 25 Years
In The Lord's Vineyard**

Pg 2

**Pope Francis Hails Nigeria's Bigard
Memorial Major Seminary
For "Invaluable Service
To The Church, Society"**

Pg 11

cont'd from Front page

Solemnity Of The Epiphany of The Lord:....

Jesus Christ to the world as the Wise Men from the East did, by shunning all divisiveness, discrimination and hatred, while reconciling with fellow men and taking decisions and actions that would impact humanity positively and drawing closer to God through his son, Jesus Christ.

With 2025 being declared as a Jubilee Year by the Supreme Pontiff,

Pope Francis, Bishop Umoh noted that the Jubilee Year dates back to the Old Testament, it is a Year that the church gives her children the opportunity for retrospection, self-examination,

Forgiveness, Repentance and Reconciliation; "The church invites us to look into ourselves, how much harm we've caused

one another, repent of it, ask for forgiveness and be reconciled with God and one another".

After the post-communion prayers, the Bishop prayed for the Governor and the faithful of Ikot Ekpene Diocese showed appreciation to the Governor for his visit, as they gifted him items.

In his remarks, Eno expressed his admiration for the Catholic Church

for their tradition of orderliness and discipline, and appreciated the Catholic faithful of Ikot Ekpene Diocese led by Bishop Camillus Umoh, for their prayers and support. He iterated the fact that his administration has been deliberate in ensuring an equitable spread of development projects across the various constituencies of the State and assured that he

will continue to pursue peace and unity in the State through inclusiveness, as demonstrated in the 2025 budget. He donated handsomely towards the 2025 hosting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria by Ikot Ekpene Diocese and promised continued collaboration with the Diocese.

In his Closing Remarks, the Bishop

thanked the Governor for his magnanimity, and for choosing to begin the year with God, and in Ikot Ekpene Diocese. He described him as a man of peace and a bridge builder and applauded him on the tremendous strides he's made, since taking the reigns of power.

He prayed for journey mercies to all present and a prosperous 2025 and beyond.



Ikpe Agog, As Very. Rev. Fr. Stephen Udo Celebrates 25 Years In The Lord's Vineyard

- Launches Two Books

By Cosmas Essiet

The journey to the Sacred Priesthood, and the life in the ministry itself, is one that is characterized by so many uncertainties, challenges and bottlenecks, and so, it was ideal, and understandable, that after many years of formation in the seminary, and, having spent twenty-five years already as a Priest, people from all Christian denominations and walks of life, rolled out drums on Sunday 1st December, 2024, and throng into the Assumption Parish, Ikpe Annang, to celebrate with Very Rev. Fr. Stephen Stanislaus Udo, as he marked his 25th Anniversary in the Lord's Vineyard.

The celebration started with the Holy

Mass at about 10:15 am. Welcoming the gathered faithful, the Jubilarian noted that God has been faithful to Him for the

asked Moses to tell the people of Israel to set aside every fifty years as a Year of Jubilee. It was to be a year of grace and pardon, everyone was expected to be reconciled with one another and

wherever they are, to gather as one big family and pray. "so the number 25 is very symbolic, it is a significant milestone worthy of celebration, that is why we gathered to rejoice with someone,

necessarily the churches he's built, and the people he has empowered, he admonished him to continue living out his Priestly life, remaining obedient to the Bishop and his successors; "Don't think that you have arrived because you are twenty-five years in the Priesthood, be

prepare for the birth of Christ, the season that our minds are directed to the second coming of Christ, it is a season of hope, prayer and charity". Like John the Baptist, he urged the faithful to 'make straight their paths', and be ready to receive Christ, the Messiah.

Part two of the event

featured the cutting of the Anniversary Cake, the Launching of his Books; "Catechesis and the Catechist", and "Nigeria and the Irony of Values", even as the people of God showered him with gifts.

In his concluding

remarks, Fr. Stephen thanked God for His numerous blessings on him and pointed out that his success in life can only be traced to God as the architect, even as he expressed his sentiments of gratitude to all those who have helped him in one way or the other to answer His call. He prayed to God for journey mercies to all.



past twenty-five years, and even though he has fumbled and stumbled along the way, he remains thankful to God for His continuous guidance and protection.

In his Homily, Very. Rev. Fr. Christian Usungurua traced the history of the Jubilee as a tradition of the Old Testament to the Book of Leviticus Chapter twenty-five, when God

debts cancelled. It was to be a year filled with joy, love peace and gratitude to God. Continuing, he noted that, in the same vein, the Catholic Church proclaims a Jubilee Year every 25 years, just like the Holy Father, Pope Francis has proclaimed 2025 as the Jubilee Year of Hope. It is a year of grace and pardon, he reiterated, and the church invites all her children

who, 25years ago was ordained a Priest in the Order of Melchizedek. He has kept the fire of God burning in his life, continually breaking the word of God to His people". He concluded.

Reminding the Jubilarian that his greatest achievement is that he has lived the life of the Priesthood these past 25years, and not

obedient, humble, and continue serving God, even more diligently". He also charged the people of God to support him, giving him the enabling environment to succeed.

With the Sunday coinciding with the First Sunday of Advent, Fr. Usungurua said "Advent is a season that prepares us for Christmas, the time we

40th Priestly Ordination/14th Episcopal Consecration Anniversary Cum Christmas Visit

**- Ikot Ekpene Diocese Celebrates Her Chief Shepherd
- Sings His Tributes, Gifts Cash, Items, And Goodwill Messages**

By Cosmas Essiet

It was a celebration galore, of tripartite nature, on Monday 23rd December 2024, as the Priests, Religious and Faithful of Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese, rolled out drums to celebrate their Chief Shepherd, Most. Rev. Dr. Camillus Raymond Umoh who clocked forty years as a Priest and fourteen years as a Bishop some months ago. The occasion also featured the Annual Christmas visit to the Bishop.

The celebration started with the Holy Mass at about 10.40am. In his introductory remarks, the Chief Celebrant of the Mass, Bishop Umoh, thanked God for having found him and his classmates worthy to be called into His vineyard and for sustaining them these past years. He noted that he was 40 years as a Priest precisely on 7th July 2024 and 14 years as a Bishop on October 9, 2024, and thanked the faithful for thinking it wise to celebrate him, even without his 'knowledge', a gesture he said will remain indelible in his mind.

In his homily, Very. Rev. Fr. Prof. Imo Obot, who reflected on the theme; "The man of God in two natures: as a Bishop and as a Priest" noted that the celebrant and indeed the entire faithful has every reason to thank God for 40 years is not 40 days. Stressing that the number 40 is very symbolic, he pointed out that Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai to get the law, Elijah travelled 40 days to meet the Lord at Mount Horeb, Noah spent 40 days in the ark during the flood, Jonah went through Nineveh in 40 days and Jesus Christ prayed and fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, and for the number 14, he

said that there are 14 generations listed in the genealogy of Abraham and that the Passover was usually celebrated on the 14th day of the first month. Again, while the number 40 symbolizes probation, purification and cleansing, the number 14 is associated with the fullness of God's plan and completion.

Preaching further, Obot, who noted that the name Camillus means Minister, observed that Bishop Umoh was already ordained as a Minister of the Gospel at Baptism. Describing the Priesthood as a gift of God for the Salvation of His people, he pointed out that, the Priesthood is a sacred Vocation, and that one of the primary functions of a priest is to

act as the mediator between God and man. He stressed the fact that as Catholic Christians, and in our existential struggles, we all need the services of the priest in our lives, and the priests, too, need us.

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist was followed by the traditional Christmas visit to the Bishop which is often characterized by rendition of Christmas Carols, Christmas reflection as well as presentation of gifts to the Diocesan Bishop.

Reflecting on the theme: Let us go over to Bethlehem ... (Luke 2:15) Fr Udo noted that "the shepherds who were among the first to receive the good news of Christ's birth provide us with a

model of faith, curiosity and urgency that we can emulate in our lives." He maintained that "in God's chice to announce the birth of his son to shepherds, we see that the message of salvation is inclusive, extending to all regardless of social standing". The preacher therefore exhorted that just as the shepherds sought out the baby Jesus, the faithful are called to prioritize their relationship with Christ above all else noting that the search for Christ is manifested through acts of service, prayer and community engagement.

Fr Udo applied the verse to the function of a Bishop and stated that just as the shepherds sought out the child Jesus, Bishops have been

called to lead the faithful to Jesus. He therefore exhorted the faithful to recognize the role of the Bishop in their spiritual lives even as he called on the faithful to pray for the Bishop that he may continue to reflect Christ's love and guidance for the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene.

In his vote of thanks and Christmas message, Umoh thanked God for His numerous blessings on him and pointed out that his success in life can only be traced to God as the architect, even as he expressed his sentiments of gratitude to all those who have helped him in one way or the other to answer His call and the manner he's been celebrated. He specifically thanked the

presbyterium for organizing the celebration of 40th Anniversary of his priestly Ordination and 15th anniversary of Episcopal ordination. He admonished the faithful, to, in the spirit of the season, preach and love one another. He prayed to God for journey mercies to all.

The event features the cutting of the anniversary cake by the Bishop, Carol rendition by the Ikot Ekpene Diocesan Choir, Song Tribute by the Gamis Choir and Cultural dance by the Marvelous dance troupe. Various groups presented their Goodwill Messages and gifts to the Bishop and the Diocese as a whole

The occasion witnessed a large gathering of the clergy and the faithful around their Bishop in a joyous Christmas mood.



2025 Jubilee Of Hope: Pope Francis Opens The Holy Door

By Cosmas Essiet

In a symbolic ceremony and rituals that marked the beginning of the the Holy Year of 2025, the Jubilee Year, the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis, on the evening of December 24, 2024, opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, Rome. This was followed by the celebration of the Holy Mass of Christmas Eve inside the St. Peter's Basilica.

One of the symbolic images of every Jubilee is that of the Pontiff

crossing the threshold of the Holy Door. The first pilgrim to cross the threshold is always the Bishop of Rome. It is a moment deeply rooted in the Middle Ages. With the traditional use of a hammer to strike the brick seal on the outside being discontinued for safety reasons, the Pope was rather seen symbolically pushing the door open. The inner wall sealing the Holy Door was recently dismantled, and the metal box containing the key to open the door, retrieved.

Tracing the origin of this sacred practice, Giovanni Rucellai of Viterbo, in 1450 noted that it was Pope Martin V in 1423 who first opened the Holy Door during a Jubilee year, at the Basilica of St. John Lateran. At the Vatican Basilica, the opening of the Holy Door was first documented on Christmas of 1499, when Pope Alexander VI ordered the Holy Door to be opened not only at St. John Lateran but also at other Roman basilicas.

The Pope proclaims the Jubilee Year after

every twenty-five years.

The last opening of the Holy Door for an Ordinary Jubilee was when Pope St. John Paul II had done so in the Year 2000. Pope Francis opened the Holy Door in 2015 for his 2016 Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

On the significance of this practice, Amedeo Lomonaco, reporting for Vatican news said; "Crossing this threshold symbolizes the journey of conversion, sealed by the encounter with Christ, the "door",

uniting us with the Father. The Jubilees are part of a profound history of faith that opens its doors to the world—a journey in which the steps of the Pontiff join those of the people of God, along the paths of forgiveness".

The door will remain open for the entire year to allow pilgrims to pass through. This gesture signifies a complete experience of the indulgence associated with the Holy Year.

The Jubilee of Hope 2025 has begun!

QAS 737 Holds Annual Reunion, Splashes Awards

By Fr Stephen Udo

It was indeed a memorable day as members of the prestigious QAS 737 class gathered in numbers to celebrate their annual reunion in the Queen of Apostles Seminary recently to celebrate themselves by giving various awards to members and others in recognition of their various levels of contribution to the welfare of members and the sustainability and growth of the alumni group. The occasion also featured Symposium with the theme: "Living in faith, not fear of the unknown for a fulfilled and happy life."

The occasion began with the Holy Mass celebrated by Very Rev Fr Christopher E. Umoh, a dignified member of the group and the Cathedral Administrator of Ikot Ekpene Diocese. In his homily, Fr Christopher harped on the need to serve God while one is still strong. He admonished that the people should remain steadfast in faith especially during the

challenging moments of life. The preacher challenged the members to ask themselves fundamental and critical questions regarding their relationship with God as they fast approach old age. Fr Umoh warned against superstitious beliefs and cultic or esoteric practices, noting that these do not afford the human person peace of mind. He exhorted the members to rather focus their faith on the Eucharist which brings the faithful into relationship with God, praying that God grant them grace to recognize the hand of God in their lives and allow the nature of God to permeate them.

The Rector, Very Rev Fr John Ekanem expressed his thankfulness to the group which he maintained was one of the alumni groups that has the welfare of the Seminary at heart noting how they have remain constant in working for the development of the Institution and seeking the welfare of the young seminarians. He expressed his appreciation for the love the group has for the Seminary.

In his reark, the President of the group, Mr. Patrick Marshall Umoh expressed his appreciation for the Rector whom he described as the most conscientious and concerned rector the Semianry has produced in recent years. Making reference to the ongoing renovation of the Seminary Library, Mr Umoh noted that the group is poised to perfect the renovation of the Seminary Library He iterated that QAS 737 has carried several projects for the benefit of the Seminary and the Seminarians. He called for the lumbering of the old whistling pine trees and a replanting of trees for economic and environmental purposes.

Two significant events which made the QAS 737 reunion exceedingly unique were Symposium and the presentation of Awards to several members of the group and the other persons who have effected positively on the welfare of the group.

The Symposium had as speakers Prof Mrs. Felicia Ekpu of the University of Uyo and

Rev Fr Nkeruwem Ekpo. Speaking on the topic, *Living in faith not fear of the unknown for a fulfilled and happy life*. Noting "a lot of traditions, cultures, philosophies and ideologies have come to challenge our very idea of God and our very idea of faith", Fr Ekpo taught that beliefs influence actions. He therefore called on the participants whose ages he suggested to be between 60 and above to do the "task of the age bracket which is evaluation. He called on them to evaluate themselves to see to what extent they are satisfied or fulfilled in their achievement and legacies they have left behind as well as the lives they have touched. He also noted that one of the things that can grant fulfillment and satisfaction is the temptations they have overcome. He mentioned that some have sense of regrets such as excessive alcoholism and opportunities missed as well as membership on cults and avarice. He noted that the wasted strength of youthfulness with all amount of opportunities that were

not taken could lead to regrets. Fr Ekpo also noted that the burdens carried to old age, the gratitude failed to express especially to parents as well as offences not forgiven and right decisions failed to make could lead to regrets and unhappiness at old age.

He therefore gave practical steps to a fulfilled and happy life, noting that by taking some actions such as slowing down as much as possible, drawing nearer to God and consolidating the gains one made at youthful age, etc. would guarantee a happy and fulfilled life at old age.

Prof Felicia Ekpu spoke on the topic, *Faith-based beliefs with emphasis on superstition*. The Prof discussed the implications of superstitious beliefs on physical health as well as social and psychological health. She identified the general effects of superstitious beliefs noting that they affect health and longevity in no small measure; and these have myriads of medical implications. She noted that some people attribute the symptoms of some diseases like Hypertension and diabetes to preternatural and superstitious forces. The Prof maintained that although the experience of stroke may appear as being slapped by a being, that no preternatural and superstitious beings may be involved.

The erudite Prof concluded her presentation by proffering ways to mitigate the effects of superstitious beliefs noting that educating people on potential negative effects of these beliefs can help to mitigate their impact. Prof Ekpu calls for promoting critical thinking which can help people to evaluate the validity of superstitious beliefs even as she called for a supportive community that guarantees a sense of belonging for the

individuals rather than being isolated.

The occasion also featured awards of excellence to deserving members in recognition of their numerous contributions. Those who were so awarded included:

1. Very Rev Fr Joseph Felix Ekpo as a soothing balm to humanity. For providing a free health outreach to members of QAS 737 Forum and to other communities in St Mary's hospital, Urua Akpan.

2. Very Rev Fr John Ekanem as one of the emergent distinguished Administrators as a priest, a "FORMATOR" and an affable host to Alumni of the Seminary.

3. Dr Hilary Enyiekere. Recognized as a classmate who stands by the class and a successful entrepreneur who cares for the growth of QAS 737 Forum and the welfare of classmates.

4. Mrs Cecilia Denis Nyarks, (a spouse of one of the classmates) in recognition of the role of the spouses as helpmates to the individual members and for encouragement to the growth of the forum.

5. Boniface Pius Udonnah. An award of encouragement to a classmate who has contributed to the growth of the class irrespective of the "seasons" and nature of the "weather" he passes through.

The alumni group consists of all those that were admitted into the institution in 1973 and those that passed out in 1977. It should be noted that the prestigious class of QAS 737 have carried out some projects almost annually for the welfare of the Seminary and that of th Seminarians. Previous years witnessed the inauguration of the magnificent Seminary gate, "Porta Regina Apostolorum" and payment of WAEC fees for some indigent students. In 2024 the class undertook the renovation and repainting of the school library and the ICT laboratory.



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Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese

JUBILEE YEAR 2025 A MOMENT OF FAITH REDISCOVERY

As we enter the year 2025, the Universal Church has declared it a Jubilee Year, a momentous occasion that calls for celebration, reflection, and renewal. This extraordinary event presents a unique opportunity for Christian communities around the world to come together, rediscover their faith, and recommit themselves to the values of compassion, forgiveness, and mercy.

The declaration of 2025 as a Jubilee Year with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope" reminds the Church of her commitment to journey together in faith, hope, and love. As a special year of remission of sins and universal pardon, the Jubilee year encourages all the faithful to renew their dedication to living out the Gospel values in their daily lives.

The celebration of the jubilee year has its root in the Old Testament. The Book of Leviticus identifies the Jubilee year as a time of social, economic, and spiritual restoration for the people of Israel; a year of liberation and restoration which was celebrated on the 50th year. The 50th year was identified as the year that followed seven scores of seven year called the sabbatical year. The year was characterized by restoration of the land to the original owner, freedom of slaves and servants, forgiveness of debts as well as rest for the land.

It was a year of social justice and spiritual renewal. Significantly, the observance of the Jubilee Year was an expression of the **covenant relationship** between Israel and God. The people were reminded that their lives and prosperity were bound up with their obedience to God's commands. Much can be said about the Old Testament celebration of the Jubilee Year. Suffice it to note that the celebration of the Jubilee Year by the Church has its origin from the Old Testament celebration by the Chosen people, though it has evolved over time.

Presently, the **Jubilee Year** in the Church is a time of special grace, during which the faithful are encouraged to deepen their faith, seek forgiveness for their sins, and receive special indulgences (remissions of temporal punishment for sins).

The Jubilee Year is declared every 25 years, although the Holy Father in consideration of the needs of the Church may declare extraordinary jubilee year at any time. The last Jubilee Year was in 2000. However, in 2015/2016, Pope Francis declared the Jubilee of Mercy.

The declaration of the 2025 Jubilee Year holds great significance for the Church in Nigeria and Ikot Ekpene Diocese in Particular. With the theme "**Pilgrims of Hope**," the Jubilee Year offers a unique opportunity for **spiritual renewal, community solidarity, and evangelization**. With particular reference to Ikot Ekpene Diocese, the theme recalls the 2023 Diocesan Synod with the theme: **Communion and Mission in the Journey of Faith**. This highlights hope and the ongoing pilgrimage that each of the faithful in the Diocese must undertake in the journey of faith.

Incidentally the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene is poised to host the regional Bishops conference, Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria within the Jubilee Year. This providentially holds great significance for the faithful and the administration of the Diocese. It affords the faithful, the privilege to receive the great spiritual and pastoral blessings that the Jubilee Year offers. The gathering of bishops, along with clergy and laity from various dioceses, offers a unique opportunity for spiritual renewal,

mutual encouragement, and a shared commitment to the mission of the Church during this special year. Indeed, hosting the **Bishops' Conference** within the context of the **2025 Jubilee Year** is of deep significance for the **Diocese**, as it aligns with the broad and all encompassing goals of the Jubilee. It brings both local, regional and universal dimensions of the Church together.

The **Jubilee Year** is inherently a time of **spiritual renewal and reconciliation**, which impacts both the individual and the general Church community. By welcoming these princes of the Church, Ikot Ekpene Diocese is afforded the opportunity to experience this renewal in a unique way. It is therefore to be expected that special moments for **penance or reconciliation services** would be organized for the faithful to be anchored by the Bishops and qualified delegates, to underline the spirit of the Jubilee.

At the Inauguration of the Jubilee Year in the Diocese on the Feast of the Holy Family, the Diocesan Bishop designated some Parishes and Shrines, Pilgrimage Centers. As is already on the agenda of the CBCN visit, expressed by the Diocesan Bishop through the planning committee, the Bishops and the delegates would be afforded the opportunity to visit Parishes. This would be a pilgrimage in the spirit of the Jubilee Year when they visit these designated centers. This will afford the delegates opportunities to engage with the theme of pilgrimage both spiritually and physically. The hosting of the Bishops' Conference in the Diocese would constitute a tangible expression of the Church's pilgrimage toward the Kingdom of God, with hope as its central message.

The faithful of the Diocese have great responsibility to contribute in one way or another towards the success of the hosting of the CBCN within the context of the Jubilee Year. Their contributions can help embody the themes of **hope, unity, mercy, and spiritual renewal** that are central to the Jubilee celebration. Parishes can organize **prayers, novenas, or special Masses** in preparation for the conference, especially focusing on the **themes of hope, mercy, and reconciliation**. By coming together in prayer, the faithful will spiritually prepare themselves and those attending the conference for the task ahead.

The **contributions** of the faithful are integral to the **success** of hosting the **Bishops' Conference**. They are called upon to do this through **prayer, acts of mercy, hospitality, financial support, or evangelization efforts**, the faithful embody the spirit of the Jubilee and help bring the themes of **hope, unity, and reconciliation** to life in both local and global contexts. Their active participation ensures that the conference is not only a **spiritual event** for bishops but also a **transformative experience** for the wider Church, fostering deeper faith, solidarity, and outreach throughout the diocese and beyond.

PAX Newspaper therefore call on all the Faithful to join hands to may the once in a lifetime event memorable.

St. Anthony Abbot (Otherwise Known As St. Anthony Of Egypt)

Feast Day: January 17th

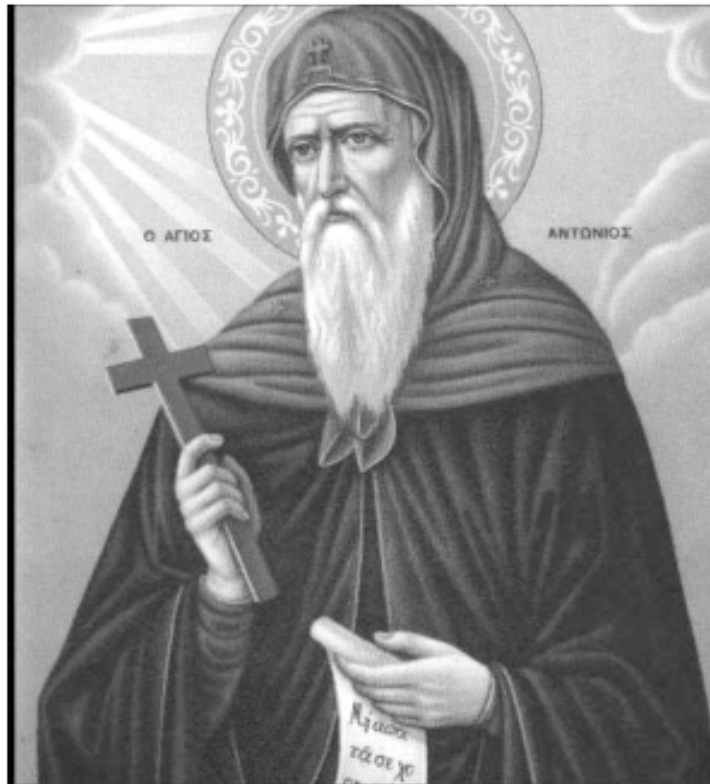
Patron Saint of Basket makers, gravediggers, butchers, swineherds, motorists, amputees, monks, and farmers

Anthony was born into an upper-class Catholic home. His parents raised Anthony and his younger sister in a small village in southern Egypt. He received a basic education and was twenty years old when his parents suddenly died. He was left with a large inheritance and the responsibility of caring for his sister. Some months later, Anthony was attending Mass and heard the Gospel story of Jesus' command to the rich young man: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Matthew 19:21). As Anthony heard these words, he knew Jesus was speaking directly to him. Shortly after, he gave away most of his property, sold almost everything else, and kept only what he needed to care for himself and his sister. But that's not exactly what the Lord had commanded! Jesus said that perfection is obtained only if one were to sell everything and give it to the poor.

Not long afterward, Anthony was at Mass once again and heard the Gospel passage, "Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself" (Matthew 6:34). Again, he knew Jesus was speaking directly to him, so he gave away even the little he had saved back, entrusted his sister to the care of some holy women, and entered the desert to live a life of poverty, solitude, prayer, and mortification.

In that harsh desert landscape, the devil attacked him in countless ways. "Think about all the good you could have done with that money you gave away!" These were the words of the evil one, trying to deter Anthony from embracing his unique vocation as a hermit. Then the devil appeared to him in physical form and sent vile creatures to frighten him. Satan tempted Anthony with boredom, laziness, and even appeared as a female temptress to seduce him. Firm in prayer and mortification, Anthony

fought off the devil and his manifestations. Though beaten senseless during these spiritual battles, he recovered in the



care of some friends who visited him.

After spending fifteen years living in a desert cave once used as a tomb, Anthony retreated even deeper into solitude, spending another twenty years in self-imposed solitary confinement. He ate only bread that friends threw over the wall of the abandoned Roman fort he called home. He never opened his mouth to speak to anyone, for God

called him to the unique life of complete solitude.

Eventually, Anthony's holy example stirred up devotion and admiration in the hearts of others. Though they could not speak to him, many wanted to imitate him. They began to build huts nearby and imitate his vocation. Then, after twenty years of solitude, God directed Anthony to exit his fort and assist the other nearby hermits with their vocations. For the next five years, he instructed the new hermits on how to organize their lives.

Anthony then withdrew once again into seclusion for the last forty-five years of his very long life. However, this time he did accept visitors from time to time and even entered nearby cities to occasionally preach and teach. Most notably, he preached firmly against the rampant Arian heresy, directly opposed the emperor for persecuting Christians, and fearlessly offered himself up to be martyred. God did not grant his desire for martyrdom, however. Instead, Anthony lived to the ripe old age of 105. He made a powerful impact upon the lives of many by his radical obedience to God's will, through his life devoted to prayer, his embrace of poverty, his courageous preaching against heresy, and his assistance to those daring to live as hermits. He was so influential that another heroic saint of that time, the bishop Saint Athanasius, wrote a biography of Saint Anthony, supplying much of what we know about him today.

Prayer: Saint Anthony, you heroically embraced the unique vocation you were given by God. You entered into silence and solitude so as to enter more deeply into communion with the Triune God. Please pray for me, that I will learn from your life of prayer and always spend time seeking God in the solitude of prayer each and every day. Saint Anthony, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.

Feast of The Month

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is a significant feast in the Catholic Church, celebrated on January 1st. Its origins, liturgical celebration, and significance are deeply rooted in the Church's understanding of Mary's role in salvation history and the theological implications of her divine motherhood.

Origin of the Solemnity
The title "Mother of God" (Theotokos) was affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, which recognized Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ, who is both fully divine and fully human. This title emphasizes the unity of Christ's two natures and affirms the belief that Mary, by giving birth to Jesus, also gave birth to God incarnate. The feast itself was established in the Latin Church by Pope Pius XI in 1931, initially celebrated on October 11. However, it was moved to January 1 by Pope Paul VI in 1969, aligning it with the Octave of

Christmas and the celebration of the New Year, thus restoring an ancient tradition that recognized the significance of Mary in the context of the Christmas season¹².

Liturgical Celebration

The liturgical celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, includes specific readings and prayers that highlight both her role as the Mother of Jesus and the implications of this role for all humanity. The readings typically focus on the divine motherhood of Mary and the naming of Jesus, which occurs on the eighth day after His birth, as described in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 2:21). The liturgy invites the faithful to reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation and the significance of Mary's cooperation in God's plan of salvation³.

The celebration



also serves as a moment of thanksgiving for the blessings of the past year and a prayer for peace and grace in the year to come. This connection to the New Year is

particularly poignant, as it allows the faithful to invoke Mary's intercession for a peaceful and fruitful year ahead⁴².

Significance of the Solemnity

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, holds profound theological significance. It underscores the importance of Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation, affirming her unique role in salvation history. By calling her the Mother of God, the Church acknowledges that through her, humanity received the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is both true God and true Man²³.

Moreover, this solemnity emphasizes Mary's role as the Mother of the Church, interceding for all believers. It invites the faithful to reflect on their own call to cooperate with God's grace, just as Mary did. The celebration also serves as a reminder of the peace that Christ brings, which is particularly relevant as the New Year begins, encouraging the faithful to seek serenity and harmony in their lives and communities⁵⁴.

Celebration on New Year's Day

The choice of January 1 for this solemnity is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it marks the Octave Day of Christmas, a time when the Church continues to celebrate the birth of Christ. This connection reinforces the idea that Mary's motherhood is intrinsically linked to the mystery of Christmas. Secondly, the New Year is a time for reflection and renewal, making it an appropriate occasion to invoke Mary's intercession for peace and blessings in the year ahead¹³.

In summary, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is a celebration rich in theological meaning and liturgical significance, serving as a bridge between the Christmas season and the New Year, while inviting the faithful to honor Mary's role in the divine plan of salvation.

Catechism Lesson For The Month Of January, 2025

The Nature of the Episcopacy

Introducing the Catechetical Theme for the Year: The theme of our Catechesis for the year 2025 is "The Bishops as Shepherds after God's Heart". This is drawn from Jeremiah 3:15 which read: "I will give you Shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding". In the preliminary pages of the Liturgical Calendar 2025 (pp v-vii), we examined this passage in the light of the office of the Bishop as Shepherd and their functions.

We also presented possible catechetical topics from the theme. We therefore refer you to that write up so as to appreciate the topics that would be covered throughout this year in our catechesis.

In this first catechetical lesson, we shall delve into the nature of the episcopacy. We shall discuss the role of the Bishops as the successors of the Apostles and the visible heads of their particular churches.

1. What is the Nature of the Episcopacy?

In the Catholic Church, Episcopacy refers to the office or role of bishops, as visible heads of the diocese or territory assigned to them. The nature of the episcopacy is integral to the Catholic Church's structure and governance, and it carries both spiritual and administrative responsibilities. Such responsibilities include: pastoral guidance, teaching, governance as well as administration of the Sacraments and liturgical oversight.

This understanding of the nature of the episcopacy is deeply rooted in Scripture, tradition, and the teachings of the Church, particularly as articulated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent ecclesiastical writings.

2. Scriptural Foundation for the Nature of the Episcopacy

In **Matt. 16:18-19**, Jesus establishes Peter as the rock upon which He will build His Church. He granted him the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. This foundational role of Peter is seen as the basis for the papacy and the hierarchical structure of the Church, which includes the episcopacy. The authority given to Peter is understood to extend to his successors, the bishops. In **Eph. 4:11-12**, St. Paul speaks of Christ giving various ministries to the Church, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. This passage highlights the diverse roles within the Church's leadership, with bishops being seen as part of this ministry, tasked with the edification of the body of Christ. **Acts 14:23** describes how Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (presbyters) in every Church they established. The act of appointing elders indicates the early Church's recognition of a structured leadership, which would later evolve into the episcopal office. These biblical passages, and many more, collectively provide a strong scriptural foundation for the understanding of the episcopacy in the Catholic Church.

3. The Nature of the Episcopacy in Tradition

The foundation of the episcopacy in Tradition is articulated through various councils, theological reflections, and ecclesiastical documents that have shaped the understanding of the episcopacy over the centuries. This is deeply rooted in the historical development of the Church's leadership structure, the writings of the early Church Fathers, and the ongoing understanding of the role of bishops as successors of the apostles. The writings of early Church leaders, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, provide insight into the structure of Church leadership in the first and second centuries. Ignatius emphasized the role of the bishop as a central figure in the community, stating that where the bishop is, there is the Church. St. Cyprian wrote extensively on the nature of the episcopacy, asserting that the bishop is the center of unity for the Church.

4. The Nature of the Episcopacy in Church Councils

Here, we consider two important councils of the Church – the Council of Nicaea and the Second Vatican Council. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) affirmed the authority of bishops in their respective dioceses and emphasized the importance of maintaining unity within the Church through the episcopal structure. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) provided a comprehensive articulation of the nature of the episcopacy, particularly in its key document "*Lumen Gentium*." This document outlines the role, authority, and responsibilities of bishops within the Church. *Lumen Gentium* provides a comprehensive understanding of the episcopacy within the context of the Church's mission. It teaches that bishops, as successors of the apostles, are called to shepherd the People of

God and are in communion with the Pope, the successor of St. Peter. This document highlights the collaborative nature of the episcopacy and its role in fostering unity within the Church.

The episcopacy is understood as the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, which is conferred through episcopal ordination. This sacrament integrates bishops into the episcopal college, making them legitimate successors of the apostles (CCC 1594).

The Bishop as the successor of the apostles and the visible head of the Church entrusted to him

The role of a bishop as the successor of the apostles and the visible head of the Church entrusted to him is a fundamental aspect of Catholic ecclesiology. This understanding is deeply rooted in the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church articulated through various documents and teachings of the Magisterium. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority." Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time" (CCC. 77).

The Bishop as Successor of the Apostles

The Bishop of Rome, known as the Pope, is recognized as the successor of Saint Peter, who was appointed by Christ as the leader of the apostles. The Pope, as the successor of Peter, possesses full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in her document, *Considerations on The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the mystery of the Church*, emphasizes that the primacy of the Pope is rooted in the divine plan, where Peter was given a unique role as the "rock" upon which Christ would build His Church.

While the Pope holds a unique position as the successor of Peter, the bishops are also considered successors of the apostles. Bishops are considered the successors of the apostles, a belief that underscores their authority and mission within the Church. This succession is not merely a matter of historical continuity but is also sacramental. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops receive the fullness of the sacrament, which integrates them into the episcopal college and empowers them to carry out their mission as shepherds of the Church. This sacramental character is essential, as it connects bishops to the apostolic mission of teaching, sanctifying, and governing the faithful.

Scripture narrates that after the death of Judas Iscariot, the Apostles gather to choose a successor to take his place (**Acts 1:15-26**). This event illustrates the practice of apostolic succession, where the apostles actively appointed leaders to continue their mission. The selection of Matthias as an apostle signifies the importance of maintaining the

apostolic leadership within the Church. The Bishops' role as the Successor of the Apostles is not merely a historical or organizational fact; it is a spiritual reality that connects the Church across generations.

In conclusion, the bishop as the successor of Peter embodies a critical aspect of the Catholic Church's structure and mission. The Pope's unique authority, rooted in the primacy of Peter, serves as the foundation for the unity of the Church, while the bishops, as successors of the apostles, collaborate in this mission under the Pope's guidance. This hierarchical relationship is essential for maintaining the integrity of the faith and the Church's apostolic mission throughout the ages.

The Bishop as the Visible Head of the Church entrusted to Him

One of the fundamental roles of the Bishop is to govern the ecclesiastical territory entrusted to him. The early Christian writings highlight the role of bishops in leading and overseeing the local Christian communities (e.g., Acts 1:20, Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Bishops serve as the visible heads of the particular Churches entrusted to them, a role that encompasses significant responsibilities in teaching, governing, and sanctifying the faithful.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church articulates this role of the Bishop as follows: The bishop to whom the care of a particular Church is entrusted is the visible head and foundation of unity for that Church (CCC, 327). Bishops are tasked with the governance of their particular Churches, which includes making laws, passing judgments, and moderating worship and apostolic activities (*Lumen Gentium*, 27). In particular, Bishops have a critical role in teaching the faith. They are responsible for ensuring that the teachings of the Church are faithfully transmitted and that the faithful are educated in the doctrines of the faith. The CCC emphasizes that bishops are to "exercise their pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them" and to do so with the authority given to them by Christ (CCC, 886). This teaching role is complemented by their duty to sanctify the faithful through the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, which is central to the life of the Church. *Lumen Gentium*, articulates that bishops govern their particular Churches "by their counsel, exhortation, example, and even by their authority and sacred power" (27).

Bishops are called to be the visible sign of unity within their dioceses. The CCC notes that bishops, as members of the episcopal college, share in the concern for all particular Churches and contribute to the welfare of the whole Mystical Body of Christ (886).

In conclusion, bishops serve as the visible heads of the Churches entrusted to them, embodying a role that is both authoritative and pastoral. Their responsibilities encompass teaching, governing, and sanctifying the faithful, all while fostering unity and communion within the Church. This multifaceted role is essential for the spiritual health of the dioceses they oversee and for the overall mission of the Church in the world. The bishop's leadership is a reflection of Christ's own pastoral care for His flock, making their ministry vital to the life of the Church.

News

Yak Ikom Enye: Samuel Atakpa Thanks God For 25 Years In The Singing Ministry

- Launches Musical Album

By Cosmas Essiet

Music has the extraordinary power to transcend time, touch our souls, and create lasting memories. Within the realm of music, there are icons whose talents and contributions leave an indelible mark on the church, society, and the world. On Sunday 22nd December 2024, the people of God in Ikot Ekpene Diocese and other lovers of good Liturgical Music, gathered at the Bishop Obot Memorial Hall, St. Anne Cathedral Ifuho, to celebrate and honor the life and legacy of one such musical icon; Prince Samuel Atakpa, having served the Church in Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese and beyond, as a Liturgical Music Minister, Choir

Master, Choir Director and Composer, for twenty-five years.

Fondly called Prince, Otuekong, or Honourable, Samuel Atakpa's genealogy is traceable to the royal family of Atakpa in Usaka Nto Akan, in Obot Akara Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. His journey in the choir began in 1994, inspired by his Late sister, Regina, and Late Mr. Innocent Ibritam of blessed memories, whose devotion and passion for the choir kindled the flames of music in his heart. Over the years, he has ascended the ranks, first becoming a Choir Master in 1999 and now serving multiple choirs with unwavering dedication, including the Diocesan

Choir, Marvels of the Lord Choir, and most Catholic Schools across the Diocese as Choir Director.

Extolling the many attributes of the Celebrator, Very. Rev. Fr. Gerald Akata pointed out that he is a very talented man, especially in the area of music, one who is very disciplined and committed to assigned duties, and acknowledged that, through him, he learned the art of singing and interpreting solfa notations.

He decried the fact that most choristers have turned the choir to a form of unionism, using their talents to fight and revolt against some of the church's and priest's decisions. He advised them to desist from such and use their talents to serve God diligently.

The event, which

also featured the Launching of his Musical Album; "YAK IKOM ENYE", and the official presentation of some of the tracks in the Album, had the Cathedral Administrator, Very. Rev. Fr. Christopher Umoh, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Essien, Very Rev. Fr. Stephen Udoh, the Diocesan Laity Council, and a host of other personalities were in attendance.

Atakpa's legacy is rich; he co-composed the fiftieth Anniversary Anthem of Ikot Ekpene Diocese, "Ndito Abasi K'Ikot Ekpene" and other iconic hymns that resonate far beyond the Liturgical spaces, offering personal meditation and upliftment. His efforts extend to mentoring, crafting instruments, and directing

cont'd on page 11

40th Priestly Ordination/14th Episcopal Consecration Anniversary Cum Christmas Visit



Very Rev. Fr. Stephen Udo's Silver Jubilee Priestly Anniversary



His Excellency Governor Umoh Eno's Visit to Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese



QAS 737 2024 Reunion And Awards Splashe



Implications Of Superstitious Beliefs On Health

(Extracted from the paper: *Faith-Based Beliefs with Superstition in Focus: Implications for Health and Longevity* by Prof. Felicia S. Ekpu, presented at the 2025 reunion of QAS 737, held recently at Queen of Apostles Seminary, Afaha Obong, Abak)

Implications of Superstitious Beliefs on Physical Health:

Physical dimension of health is probably the easiest to understand. The state of physical health according to Park (2009) implies the notion of 'perfect functioning of the body'. It views health biologically as a state in which every cell and every organ is functioning at optimum capacity and in a perfect harmony with the rest of the body. Several physical ailments have been associated with superstitious etiologies. For instance, the very rampant issue of High Blood Pressure (Raised B/P) or Hypertension when so diagnosed. Hypertension is a chronic concern due to its role in the causation of coronary heart disease, stroke and other vascular complications. It is the commonest cardiovascular disorder, posing a major public health challenge. It is, according to Park, one of the major risk factors for cardiovascular mortality which accounts for 20-50 percent of all deaths. This health challenge could be medically and scientifically explained yet it could also be viewed with spiritual or superstitious undertone. Hypertension is not only one of the major risk factors to most forms of cardiovascular diseases but it is a condition with its own risk factors. The WHO Scientific Group reviewed the risk factors for essential hypertension thus; Non-modifiable and modifiable risk factors.

The Non-modifiable risk factors to essential hypertension are, age, sex, genetic factors and ethnicity. While the modifiable risk factors are, obesity, salt intake, saturated fat, dietary fibre, alcohol, physical activity, environmental stress, socio-economic status etc. The intention is not to dwell so much on hypertension as a disease condition but to explore the management strategies of this disease condition that is often referred to as the 'silent killer' because of its tendency to strike its victim unnoticed and unannounced. With prompt diagnosis hypertension can be managed and controlled, but where people fail to check and know their status, the outcome could be fatal resulting in stroke. This stroke episode, which is a disruption in blood supply to the brain causes a black out when it occurs, what superstitious minded individuals will refer in the local parlance as 'ekpo amia' (ghost attack) because the victim experiences a sudden slap-like bang, hence turning attention away from medical causes of this ailment which could include stress, obesity, heart attack, etc.. This calls for the need to always check one's blood pressure especially if treated as hypertensive. Even if one is not a known hypertensive, there's need for regular health checks. Acquire an electronically operated blood pressure monitor for convenience.

Another condition of great concern is Diabetes Mellitus. Diabetes is a disease characterized by a state of chronic hyperglycemia, resulting from a diversity of etiologies, environmental and genetic acting jointly. The underlying cause of diabetes is the defective production or action of insulin, a hormone that controls glucose, fat and amino acid metabolism. Characteristically, diabetes is a long-term disease with variable clinical manifestations and progression. Chronic hyperglycemia, from whatever cause leads to a number of complications: cardiovascular, renal, neurological, ocular and others such as intercurrent infections. There are basically two types of Diabetes Mellitus; Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus (IDDM) and Non-Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus (NIDDM). Insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) is the most severe form of the disease. Its onset is typically abrupt and is usually seen in individuals less than 30 years of age. It is lethal unless promptly diagnosed and treated. This form of disease is immune-mediated in over 90 per cent of cases and idiopathic in less than 10 per cent cases.

Non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) is much more common than IDDM. It is often discovered by chance. It is typically gradual in onset and occurs mainly in the middle-aged and elderly, frequently mild, slow to ketosis and is compatible with long survival if given adequate treatment. Common manifestations of diabetes mellitus include; polyuria (excessive urination), polydipsia (excessive thirst), loss of weight (even when the person may be eating well), lassitude and loss of energy (if the condition is not diagnosed may lead to drowsiness or even coma). Other symptoms that may be present include; particularly in elderly women who are obese, irritation of the genitalia (pruritus vulvae) caused by local deposition of sugar from the urine, this may be severe and disturbs the sleep. Paraesthesia (tingling may occur in the finger and feet, Aching and cramps are common in the legs. Temporary blurring of vision: 'excess sugar causes changes in refraction in the eyes. Minor infections such as boils or unhealed cuts are liable to occur. Most often the signs and symptoms of diabetes may be associated with superstition because of their manifestations especially where confirmatory tests are not done. Irrespective of how one feels about the etiology of diabetes, the best option is to regularly check the blood sugar to avoid complications of

diabetes which are not reversible. There are many cases of blindness today resulting from diabetes complications (retinopathy) which are otherwise attributed to human forces.

Another physical health challenge common to men is the issue of enlarged prostate. What causes the prostate gland to enlarge is unknown but there could be predisposing factors such as heredity, age and changes in the cells of the testicles. This is a condition that could also be linked to forces outside medical explanation. If this condition develops during reproductive years, fertility may be impaired and this could cause crises in families as there may be accusations and counter accusations.

Stress is another critical health challenge with very high death toll. Globally, studies have shown the impact of stress on health (Onigbogi & Barnejee, 2019; Davies, 2022). Stress can be defined as 'any challenge to homeostasis or the body's internal sense of balance (Waghacharare et al, 2013). Stress refers to the responses that occur in the body as a result of what is called stressor or stimulus. This occurs when the internal balance or equilibrium of the body system is disrupted. Stress can manifest itself either as eustress or as distress. Eustress literally translated as 'good stress' is a positive form of stress that motivates an individual to continue working. It is when this stress is no longer tolerable and/or manageable that distress manifests. In other words everyone experiences stress. Aschbacher et al,(2013) noted that evidence suggests that under certain circumstances, stress exposures may have the potential to enhance an organism's performance and resilience, in other words, stress can also be beneficial.

Stress has been known to cause depression, anxiety, behavioural problems and medical issues such as non-communicable diseases including metabolic syndrome, obesity and reduced insulin sensitivity resulting from unhealthy lifestyle and stress system dysregulation. Makinde (2024) observed that morbidity and mortality due to stress-related illnesses are alarming and could be major contributing factors to the six leading causes of death in the world. Some forms of stress are marital stress, work stress, academic stress, exam anxiety, increased expectation, financial problems, changes in living conditions and difficulties in managing personal life could elicit physiological responses from the body. The crux of this discuss is to bring to the fore the damages associated with stress if not well handled and the risk of attributing its prognosis to some superstitious reasons.

Malaria, a well-known tropical disease caused by the bite of an infected mosquito with well-established pathophysiology can be viewed as having some supernatural origin. Most patients with cerebral malaria with its neurological complications see it as not being 'ordinary'. With this notion remedies can only be sought 'extraordinarily'. It is sad to note that several people have died from malaria infection because of mismanagement of such cases.

Other conditions worth mentioning are osteoarthritis and obesity. Arthritis is an age-related ailment (it comes with advancing age). It is a condition that affects the joints and bone tissues. The etiology of arthritis could be worsened by the presence of obesity. This condition could also be linked to superstitious belief.

Implications of Superstitious Beliefs on Social and Psychological Health

A psycho-social problem worth mentioning is the age-related dementia. Dementia is a syndrome in which there is deterioration in cognitive function beyond what might be expected from the usual consequences of biological ageing. Though it mainly affects older people, it is not an inevitable consequence of ageing. The WHO (2021) noted that the disorder results from a variety of diseases and injuries that primarily or secondarily affect the brain with reference to Alzheimer's disease as the most common form of dementia with 60-70 per cent of cases. Other types of dementia include vascular dementia, fronto-temporal dementia, Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease, Parkinson's disease dementia, Huntington's disease dementia and dementia with depression. It is documented that more than half of all people with dementia are undiagnosed (WHO, 2017).

Dementia is not without its physical, psychological, social and economic impacts, not on the sufferers alone but also on their families and society at large. The psychological effect can be terrifying on the family members especially in environments where there is little or no knowledge about the disorder. It is this lack of knowledge that will cause the family members to attribute it to superstitious origin. The onset or risk factor of dementia has been scientifically associated with aging of the brain cells. Moreover there exists a positive correlation between cardiovascular risk factors, such as hypertension, diabetes and obesity, and an increased susceptibility to the development of dementia (Odelola et al, 2024). The presence of these factors has been associated with an increased susceptibility to developing dementia nevertheless the potential negative effects can be alleviated via the implementation of improved health care practices and lifestyle modification.

The most prominent risk factor for dementia is age as the likelihood of risk has an exponential growth pattern as one advanced in age. Various lifestyle factors (modifiable factors)

such as dietary patterns, levels of physical inactivity, social inactivity and alcohol and tobacco consumption have the potential to exert an impact on the susceptibility to dementia. A study by Yoneda et al (2022) discovered individuals higher in consciousness and extraversion and lower in neuroticism, had more years of cognitive health span. Yong-Bo et al (2020) earlier concluded that exercise, social activity, intelligence games and reading are protective factors for delaying the onset of dementia.

Odelola et al (2024) observed that on cultural point of view, many community members view dementia as a consequence of wrong doing of the sufferer (Karma) or punishment from God, result of witchcraft, insanity and the likes. Low knowledge about dementia subjects the sufferers to family neglect as their children and family members perceive them as witches and wizards resulting in social isolation, abuse and stigmatization.

General Effects of Superstitious Beliefs on Health: There are many ways superstitious beliefs can affect health and longevity. The medical implications are as follows:

1. **Delayed Medical treatment:** Superstitious belief can lead to delayed medical treatment, as individuals may rely solely on spiritual remedies, herbs or concoctions or faith healing instead of seeking medical attention. Generally superstitious beliefs accompanied by fear may delay the search for orthodox remedies and this delay may be disastrous. Some may seek medical attention only when the condition is worst and they are at the point of death.
2. **Non-adherence to medication:** Superstition may lead to non-adherence to medication as they may believe that their faith is predetermined or medication is unnecessary.
3. **Use of unproven remedies or harmful substances:** The use of unproven remedies, harmful substances, poisonous herbs or concoctions, herbal supplements or spiritual healing in an attempt to cure illness or ward off evil spirits are due to superstitious beliefs and can be ineffective or even harmful to the body. The unfortunate aspect is that most of these remedies do not have measurement or dosage in line with body constitution and the active ingredients not known. Their consumption may cause damage to internal organs like the liver, kidneys, lungs, the heart, etc. leading to organs dysfunction and death.
4. **Refusal of medical treatment:** Superstitious beliefs may lead to refusal of medical treatment even when it is very necessary to save a life.
5. **Increased risk of infectious diseases:** Superstitious beliefs may cause increased risk of infectious diseases as individuals may avoid vaccinations or other preventive measures due to misconceptions and fear.
6. **Malnutrition and fasting:** Certain superstitious and faith-based beliefs may promote malnutrition by way of unnecessary fasting leading to nutritional deficiencies and its related health problems. Prolong abstinence and fasting leads to dehydration, hypoglycemia and even death.

Impact on Health and Longevity:

1. **Reduced Life Expectancy:** Faith-based beliefs and superstition can lead to reduced life expectancy, as individuals may delay or avoid medical treatment and engage in unhealthy behaviours or experience chronic stress and anxiety.
2. **Increased Morbidity:** Superstitious beliefs can lead to increased morbidity as individuals may experience a great range of negative health outcomes, including mental disorders, chronic and infectious diseases.
3. **Reduced Quality of Life:** Superstitious beliefs lead to reduced quality of life as individuals may experience anxiety, stress, depression and social isolation which can impact daily life and relationships.
4. **Poor Health Outcomes:** Superstitious beliefs can lead to poor health outcomes, as individuals may experience delayed diagnosis, inadequate treatment or poor management of chronic diseases.

Mitigating the Negative Effects of Superstitious Beliefs

1. **Education and Awareness:** Educating individuals on the potential negative effects of superstitious beliefs can help mitigate their impact.
2. **Promoting Critical Thinking:** Encouraging skepticism and critical thinking can help individuals evaluate the validity of superstitious beliefs.
3. **Fostering a Supportive Community:** Creating a supportive community that encourages open discussion and debate can help individuals feel less isolated and more empowered to make informed decisions about their health and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.
4. **Mental Health Support:** Providing mental health support and resources can help individuals manage anxiety, stress, depression, and other mental health concerns related to superstitious beliefs.

Cardinal Onaiyekan Calls for Global, National Peace, End to Man-made Disasters

As the world welcomes the year 2025, His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja, has called for global and national peace, as well as an end to man-made disasters currently being experienced worldwide.

In his homily at the Holy Mass commemorating the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and the New Year celebration at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, Nyanya, Cardinal Onaiyekan lamented the turbulent and painful experiences that characterized the year 2024. He noted that most of these painful experiences, such as hunger, insecurity, and untold hardship, were not natural disasters but man-made, resulting from policies implemented by

leaders and the government.

"We pray that God will inspire our leaders to change and review their policies and to take different and more effective actions to promote the well-being and security of our people," Cardinal Onaiyekan said.

Cardinal Onaiyekan further emphasized the need for world leaders to prioritize peace, citing

ongoing conflicts in the Holy Land, Jerusalem, Ukraine, Russia, and the Democratic Republic of

The Prince of the Church also reflected on the significance of the New Year, noting that the

years. "The whole world is celebrating the New Year, even when most of them do not celebrate Christmas, but the celebration of the New Year will be meaningless if you do not talk about Jesus," he affirmed.

Explaining the significance of the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the 80-year-old Prelate noted that the celebration marks the end of the octave of Christmas. "Today is the end of the octave of Christmas... So today, which is eight days after Christmas, Jesus was circumcised according to Jewish law and given the name Jesus. The name Jesus means Savior, because he was to save the world from sin," he explained.

The Cardinal further noted that the focus of today's celebration is on the Blessed Virgin Mary, who carried the child Jesus, emphasizing that "she knew that the child was not just an ordinary baby, but the Mother of God, hence Mary became the Mother of God."

The Emeritus Archbishop, who has maintained a 30-year tradition of celebrating the New Year Mass with the Catholic Community of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, Nyanya, imparted his paternal blessings on them. "We have come to thank God for keeping us alive throughout 2024, and we pray that this new year will bring even greater blessings."



Congo, among others. "May world leaders heed the advice that it is better to yield to peace than war," he admonished.

celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ has become a universally accepted reference point for measuring humanity's

Pope Francis Hails Nigeria's Bigard Memorial Major Seminary For "Invaluable Service To The Church, Society"

By Jude Atemanke

Pope Francis has hailed the 100-year-old Bigard Memorial Major Seminary in Nigeria for its "invaluable service" to the people of God.

In a goodwill message addressed to the Rector of the National Major Seminary based in the country's Catholic Diocese of Enugu, Fr. Albert Okey Ikpenwa, the Holy Father expressed gratitude for the institution's legacy of preparing Clergy for service.

"This anniversary affords me the opportunity to express my esteem for the seminary, particularly for the quality of the priests and bishops it has produced over the years, and for its invaluable service to the Church and society in times of civil unrest," Pope Francis said in the goodwill message read out during the Thursday, November 21 conclusion of the centenary celebrations.

He added, "As you mark this important moment in the seminary's history, I pray that this centenary will be an occasion for all of you not only to reflect on the great good accomplished in these past decades, but to deepen your commitment to finding new and refreshing ways of training Seminarians who, well equipped in prayer, study,

fraternity, and mission, will continue to bring the closeness of God and the newness of the gospel to every culture and people."

Alluding to the variety of challenges the people of God in Nigeria grapple with, including insecurity and the high cost of living, Pope Francis advocated for solidarity manifested in being close to each other and acts of love and compassion.

"In a particular way, recognizing the ongoing challenges in Nigeria, I encourage you to be the heralds of the Lord's great mercy, working for reconciliation among all your brothers and sisters, helping to ease the burden of the poor and those who in need, and adopting as your own God's style of closeness, compassion, and tender love," the Holy Father said.

He assured the leadership of Bigard

Memorial Major Seminary of his "spiritual closeness as you give thanks for the many ways in which Almighty God has blessed the Seminary over these 100 years."

"With gratitude for the tireless efforts of our mentors, past and present, in forming Priests to serve the Church in Nigeria and beyond, I invoke upon all of you an abundance of the Lord's gifts, and I send my blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in Christ, the Good Shepherd," the Holy Father implored.

Bigard Memorial Major Seminary in Enugu was founded in Onitsha in 1922 and officially opened in 1924. It was moved to the current location in Southeastern Nigeria in 1951.

It was named after benefactors Stephanie and Jeanne Bigard, French mother and daughter,

foundresses of the Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle, who donated the funds for the main building.

In 1982, St. Pope John Paul II visited Bigard Memorial Major Seminary, the first Nigerian Seminary to receive such a guest.

In another goodwill message, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, the Pro-Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelization, has lauded Bigard Memorial Major Seminary for "enriching the Church and society, both in Nigeria and abroad, with spiritual guidance, academic excellence, pastoral fruitfulness, and cultural engagement."

Cardinal Tagle said, "Seminary formation goes beyond intellectual development. It aims to cultivate the heart, the sacred space where a true encounter with Jesus

occurs. I urge those entrusted with formation to ensure that the Seminary becomes a sanctuary of deep conversion and intimate encounters with the heart of Christ."

"By fostering an environment where the heart is nurtured with ardent faith in Christ and unwavering love for his Church, Bigard Memorial Seminary becomes not only a center of learning, but also a cradle for profound spiritual growth," he said.

The Vatican-based Filipino Cardinal, who started his Episcopal Ministry in December 2001 as the Bishop of Imus in the Philippines said.

He urged the leadership of the Nigerian Seminary to continue ensuring that Seminarians grow in faith and love for the Church, producing "not only scholars but also saints and compassionate shepherds."

"As you look forward

to the future, I encourage you to uphold and build upon the great legacy that you have inherited from your forebears," the Catholic Church leader, who was elevated Cardinal in November 2012 further said.

Meanwhile, in his speech during the November 21 event, the Apostolic Nuncio in Nigeria lauded the Nigerian Major Seminary for giving the Church personnel.

"This seminary, through its illustrious history, has provided Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, and thousands of Priests for service in Nigeria and throughout the world. It is very much part of the Universal Church, and for that reason, it gives me great joy to be here," Archbishop Michael Francis Crotty said.

The Irish-born Vatican diplomat added, "We commemorate 100 years of Bigard, not necessarily to look back but to look

cont'd from page 7 Yak Ikom Enye: Samuel Atakpa

the music with dreams of establishing a mentorship center for liturgical music and documentation of timeless hymns for liturgical evangelization.

In his Vote of Thanks, Atakpa thanked God first for the way He created him, the many talents he bestowed on him, and for leading him aright these past years. He thanked

all those who have helped him climb the ladder of life and those whose various contributions led to the success of the day. He pledged his unalloyed loyalty to the Church and promised to continue singing praises to God.



2025 Jubilee Of Hope: 20 Ways To Effectively Engage Catholics In The Celebration

The Holy Father, Pope Francis on May 9, 2024, in front of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica delivered the papal bull, "Spes Non Confundit", which means "Hope Does Not Disappoint". By this declaration, the Holy Father announced the 2025 Jubilee of Hope. He centered the theme around pilgrimage and the promotion of peacebuilding, with the motto "Peregrinantes in Spem" (Pilgrims in hope).

The tradition of the Jubilee comes from the Bible, where every 50th year was a time for forgiveness, freeing captives, and letting the land rest. The 2025 Jubilee year will be celebrated from December 24, 2024, to January 6, 2026. It is a time for Catholics to renew their relationship with God, others, and creation, and to share the hope of the Christian faith with people around the world.

Here are 20 ways to engage Catholics in this celebration:

1. **Organise Pilgrimage:** Parish Communities, groups or even individuals should plan a pilgrimage to a sacred site in their local dioceses or to Rome and other holy places. This will avail their members an opportunity to deepen their faith and connect with others and equally foster

spiritual growth.

2. **Host Eucharistic Adorations:** Frequent hosting of Eucharistic adorations, where Catholics can come together to pray and worship before the Blessed Sacrament. This will promote a deeper understanding of the Eucharist as the soul and summit of our Christian worship.

3. **Jubilee Prayer Days:** Designate specific days for prayer and reflection, encouraging Catholics to come together and pray for hope and renewal. This will



foster a sense of community and spiritual connection.

4. **Launch Jubilee Retreat:** Organize a retreat that focuses on the theme of hope, providing Catholics with a chance to reflect, pray, and rejuvenate their faith. This offers a unique opportunity for spiritual growth.

5. **Introduce Jubilee Catechesis:** Develop catechetical programs that focus on the theme of hope, helping Catholics to deepen their understanding of their faith. This will promote spiritual growth and also education.

6. **Establish Acts of Mercy Projects:** Launch projects that promote acts of mercy, encouraging Catholics to put their faith into action. This promotes a sense of compassion and service.

7. **Open Spiritual Centres Locally:** Establish local spiritual centers where Catholics can come together for prayer, reflection, and community building. This provides a welcoming space for spiritual growth and interaction.

8. **Create Digital Engagement Platforms:** Develop digital platforms that allow Catholics to engage with the Jubilee of Hope remotely, including online prayer groups, webinars, and social media campaigns. This expands the reach of the celebration.

9. **Incorporate Hope in Sunday Homilies:** Priests are encouraged to incorporate the theme of hope into their Sunday homilies. This will provide Catholics with inspiration and guidance.

10. **Youth and Children Programs:** Develop programs specifically for youth and children, helping them to understand and engage with the theme of hope. This will maximally build spiritual growth and development in young Catholics.

11. **Jubilee Workshop and Seminars:** Host workshops and seminars that explore the theme of hope in-depth, providing Catholics with a chance to learn and reflect. This will be a great source of education and enlightenment on the theme of 'hope.'

12. **Organise Interfaith Dialogue:** Organize interfaith dialogue events that bring together Catholics and people of other faiths to discuss the theme of hope. This will promote greater understanding and respect between different faith communities.

13. **Distribute Jubilee Devotional Materials:** Create and distribute devotional materials, such as prayer cards, booklets, and medals, that will help Catholics to engage with the Jubilee of Hope. This will provide a tangible reminder of the

celebration.

14. **Highlight Lives of the Saints:** Highlight the lives and stories of saints who embodied hope, inspiring Catholics to follow their example. This will equally promote spiritual growth and devotion.

15. **Encourage Sacramental Participation:** Encourage Catholics to participate in the sacraments, particularly reconciliation and the Eucharist, as a way of deepening their faith and experiencing hope.

16. **Organise Community Outreach Programs:** Organize community outreach programs that provide support and service to those in need. This will also help Catholics to put their faith into action, and develop a sense of compassion and service.

17. **Host Cultural Celebration:** Host cultural celebrations that showcase the diversity and richness of Catholic traditions, helping Catholics to connect with their heritage and faith. This will build a sense of community and belonging.

18. **Create Jubilee Art and Exhibition:** Create art and exhibitions that reflect the theme of hope. This will provide Catholics with a unique way to engage with the celebration. It will also promote creativity and self-expression.

19. **Develop Jubilee Educational Curricula:** Develop educational curricula that incorporate the theme of hope, helping Catholics to deepen their understanding of their faith. This will also greatly promote spiritual growth and education.

20. **Launch a Jubilee Hope Fund:** Establish a fund that supports initiatives and projects that promote hope and renewal, providing Catholics with a way to contribute to the celebration. This fosters a sense of generosity and solidarity.

The 2025 Jubilee of Hope offers numerous opportunities for spiritual renewal and celebration. The faithful can obtain up to two indulgences per day, including receiving communion twice a day. The Pope will grant plenary indulgence to Jubilee pilgrims on December 24, when the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica opens. The Jubilee logo featuring four figures embracing each other, represents solidarity and brotherhood, with the motto "Peregrinantes in Spem" (Pilgrims in hope).

Pope Appoints Sr. Simona Brambilla As Vatican's First Female Prefect



Pope Francis appoints Sr. Simona Brambilla, an Italian-born religious sister from the Consolata Missionaries, as Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, along with Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime as Pro-Prefect.

Sister Simona Brambilla, who will turn 60 on March 27, previously served as the Superior General of the Consolata Missionaries.

Pope Francis appointed her on Monday, the Solemnity of the Epiphany, as Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

She has served as Secretary of the same Dicastery since October 7, 2023, and becomes the first woman to be appointed Prefect of a Dicastery of the Holy See.

Pope Francis also chose Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, 65, whom he created Cardinal in the Consistory on September 30, 2023, as Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery.

Sister Simona Brambilla has a background that includes missionary experience in Mozambique. She was a professional nurse

before joining the Consolata Missionary Sisters Institute, which she led from 2011 to 2023.

On July 8, 2019, the Pope for the first time appointed seven women as members of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Later, Sister Brambilla was first chosen as Secretary of the Dicastery and now as Prefect.

Since the beginning of Pope Francis's pontificate, the presence of women in the Vatican has increased. According to overall data covering both the Holy See and Vatican City State from 2013 to 2023, the percentage of women has risen from 19.2% to 23.4%.

A pathway outlined by the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* of 2022, the Pope has made it possible for laypeople, including women, to lead a Dicastery and become Prefect, a role previously reserved for Cardinals and Archbishops.

In Vatican City State, Pope Francis has appointed two women to leadership positions during his pontificate. In 2016, he named Barbara Jatta as Director of the Vatican

Museums, which has traditionally been led by laypeople. In 2022, he named Sister Raffaella Petrini as Secretary General of the Governorate, a role usually held by a bishop.

There are also several female Undersecretaries, such as Gabriella Gambino and Lina Ghisoni at the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, while Sister Carmen Ros Nortes of the Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation serves as Undersecretary at the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Emilce Cuda is Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America; Nataša Govekar heads the theological-pastoral department of the Dicastery for Communication (our parent organization); Cristiane Murray is Deputy Director of the Holy See Press Office; and Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof is Deputy Coordinator of the Council for the Economy. The General Secretariat of the Synod also has a female Undersecretary, French-born Sister Nathalie Becquart.

On December 13, 2024, the Pope appointed Sister Simona Brambilla and Maria Lia Zervino, former president of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO), as members of the 16th Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat. Maria Lia Zervino had already been appointed as a member of the Dicastery for Bishops in 2022.

Hunger and Despair: How Tragic Stampedes Exposed Nigeria's Deepening Crisis

Rev. Fr. Raymond Anoliefo



Nigeria has been plunged into mourning as a series of stampedes in Ibadan, Abuja, and Anambra State claimed the lives of over 67 people, including children, in just one week. These tragic incidents, which occurred during charity

events aimed at distributing essential items, have not only highlighted the desperation of citizens but also exposed critical failings in economic policies, social structures, and crowd management practices.

Economic Hardship: Policies and Their Consequences – The nation is currently facing its most severe economic crisis in decades. Inflation has skyrocketed to an alarming 34.6%, the

highest in nearly three decades, while the value of the naira has plummeted against the dollar. These challenges have been compounded by the removal of fuel subsidies and currency devaluation under President Bola Tinubu's administration.

Though these reforms aim to stabilise the economy and attract foreign investments, they have led to an unprecedented rise in fuel prices and a surge in the cost of essential commodities. For millions of Nigerians already living on the brink, the impact has been devastating, forcing many into extreme poverty. The desperation to secure basic necessities was tragically evident in the chaotic scenes at these charity events.

Poor Crowd Control: A Deadly Oversight – Inadequate crowd management played a significant role in these tragedies. In Abuja, a stampede occurred at Holy Trinity Catholic Church at the crack of dawn as crowds surged to access relief items, leading to ten fatalities. In Anambra's Okija community, 22 lives were lost during a food distribution drive, while in Ibadan, Oyo State, the death toll climbed to 35. These incidents expose the lack of preparedness by the organisers of such events. Venues were not adequately secured, and there was minimal coordination with security agencies. Organisers underestimated the desperation and sheer volume of attendees, leading to uncontrollable surges and tragic outcomes.

vulnerable populations. These could include subsidised essential goods, direct financial assistance to struggling families, and large-scale job creation programs to ease unemployment.

Better Crowd Management: Event organisers must prioritise safety. Proper crowd control measures such as secured venues, ticketed entries, barriers, and coordination with law enforcement are critical to ensuring orderly distributions.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Educating the public on orderly conduct during events is essential. Campaigns that emphasise patience, community responsibility, and the dangers of chaos can help reduce risks during future gatherings.

Government Accountability: The government must take responsibility for policies that deepen economic hardship. Policymakers should engage with communities, advocacy groups, and experts to reevaluate strategies and implement solutions prioritising citizens' welfare.

A Call to Action
These stampedes are a painful reminder of the depths of Nigeria's economic and social crisis. They call for urgent intervention from the government, civil society, private organisations, and community leaders. Addressing the root causes of these tragedies requires a united effort to alleviate poverty, ensure public safety, and rebuild trust among citizens.

As the country mourns these avoidable deaths, the hope remains that the lessons learned from this tragic week will inspire the systemic changes needed to prevent future calamities. May God grant eternal repose to the departed souls and comfort to the families who are left to grieve their losses. Amen!

Fr. Michael Banjo Assumes Office as CSN Secretary General

By Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh, CSN

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has appointed Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Michael Ayanleke Banjo as the new Secretary General (SG) of its headquarters, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), taking over from Fr. Zacharia Samjumi. Until his appointment, Fr. Banjo served as the Deputy Secretary General and the Director of Pastoral Affairs Department of the CSN.

Born on August 9, 1971, the well-travelled gentleman was ordained a priest on July 18, 1998, for the Catholic Diocese of Ijebu-Ode. Back in his diocese, he held various positions, including Judicial Vicar of the Ijebu-Ode Diocese, Director of Family and Human Life Department, and Chaplain of the Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye.

The new CSN SG is a seasoned canonist of the Church who brings a wealth of experience to his new role. His

impressive curriculum vitae reveals a distinguished academic and pastoral career as he holds a Doctorate in Canon Law (J.C.D.), Licentiate in Canon Law (J.C.L.), Masters in Government and Politics with specialization in International Relations, and a Diploma in International Law and Diplomacy, among others.

As the Secretary General of the CSN, Fr. Banjo is expected to provide meaningful leadership and guidance to the Secretariat, which serves as the administrative and coordinating arm of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).

The office of the Secretary General is esteemed and critical to the general welfare and progress of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, as it requires strong leadership, administrative, and communication skills. The Secretary General

serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the CSN, responsible for managing the various resources of CBCN, implementing the resolutions of the body of Nigerian Bishops, and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Secretariat.

With his rich experience and expertise, Fr. Banjo is well-equipped to handle the challenges and responsibilities of his new office. The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria and the entire Catholic community in Nigeria and beyond look forward to his service and guidance in promoting the mission and values of the Church.

In a related development, Fr. Peter Babangida Audu takes over from Fr. Uche



Obodoechina as the Director of Church & Society and the Executive Secretary of Caritas Nigeria, Fr. Lawrence Emehel takes over from Fr. Joseph Nomhwange, SMA, as the Director of Mission & Dialogue, while Fr. Augustine Fasiku joins CSN Management as the Director of Pastoral affairs, taking over from Fr. Michael Banjo. All the Directors, experts in their different fields, are expected to work in close collaboration with the new SG to achieve the vision of CBCN for the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

Authentic Christian Living And Its Challenges Today

Introduction

One of the demands made in many walks of life is for authenticity. We live in a world of shallow imitations where hypocrisy is the order of the day. A lot of people who go to Church resemble Christians but they lack real authenticity. They have no living vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Hence, we have Christians who go to Church on Sundays and perhaps attend Morning Mass everyday but in moments of crisis, they go to native doctors or fortune tellers or self-styled prophets in Pentecostal churches to find solution to their problems; that is why also a trader who proclaims to be a Christian sees nothing wrong in selling fake products to a Catholic Priest who comes to patronize him. What shall we say about the Christian youth who is a member of some Marian societies but sees nothing wrong in nude dressing or use of contraceptives? The list is endless.

What does it mean to live an authentic Christian life? Authentic Christian life is life based on the model which Jesus Christ, Son of God and the founder of the Catholic Church has set before us. Authentic Christianity never needs advertisement or publicity. It gives off a fragrance and a fascination that attracts people like flies are attracted to honey.

The most subtle stratagem ever devised by Satan to deceive and mislead people is that of causing Christians to practice sham Christianity before the world. In sharp contrast to this is authentic Christianity as its founder Jesus Christ himself intended it to be.

Marks of authentic Christian living

Here are unmistakable marks of authentic Christian living:

The authentic Christian **patterns his life after the life of Jesus**: "Let the same mind be found in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Note the key phrase: Jesus "emptied Himself". He set aside the prerogatives and powers of Godhood in order to identify fully with us. He lived the same kind of life we lived, facing temptation, suffering, pain and sorrow, enduring frustration, just as we do. He approached life the same way you and I must approach life: living in dependence on God the Father, seeking guidance and strength through continual prayer, trusting God and listening to His leading, and being humbly obedient. That is why the authentic Christian must "let the same mind be in him that was in Christ Jesus". That is authentic Christianity – Christianity in its truest, purest, most distilled form. That is the Christianity which you and I are to follow, the only Christianity worthy of the name.

The authentic Christian loyally **defers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church and follows the lead of the Holy Spirit**. Who assures us that even in the midst of tragedy or a troubling or threatening series of events, He will give us His peace, that peace "which surpasseth all understanding". The Acts of the Apostles are filled with instances of guidance by the Holy Spirit. As one reads the multiple testimonies of Peter, Paul and other disciples about how the Spirit guided them to and from specific towns and circumstances, one gets the feeling that the direct experience of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church was almost commonplace (see Acts 8:28-30; 10:18-20; 11:12; 13:4; 16:6-8; 19:20-22; 20:21-23; 21:3-5). The Holy Spirit guides us in our long-term plans, vocations and choices in life.

Another unmistakable mark of authentic Christianity is **unimpeachable integrity**. Webster's dictionary defines integrity as "the quality of state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty and sincerity". In the whole of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, we see integrity as a valid, desirable character trait. From God's perspective, one who has integrity must be of sound moral principle, upright, honest, and sincere in conduct. The authentic Christian does not indulge in hypocrisy or pretence but speaks and acts before God and man with sincerity. In other words, we are to be honest people. We must mean what we say. The world admires sincerity and feels it is the ultimate expression of character; but according to Paul, sincerity is just the beginning of character, God's minimum expectations of authentic Christians. The very least we should expect from ourselves as Christians and which the world expects from us is that we thoroughly believe and practice what we say. Closely allied to this is an attitude of **transparency**, of openness to investigation. That is what Paul means when he says that whatever we do should be done "before God" or "in the sight of God". To walk in the sight of other people permits us to hide our sins and contradictions behind a façade but to walk in the sight of God requires total honesty with Him and with ourselves because nothing can be hidden from God's sight. This does not mean we can live sinlessly, but rather that there must be no cover-up or evasion of the facts of our sin when it occurs. It means there are no areas of denial. All is evaluated and tested by the purity and knowledge and wisdom of God – and what is sinful, we confess and we repent of before God. A man who walks in the sight of God is more interested in his inner reality than his outer reputation.

Being able to trust in God is another quality of being an authentic Christian. 'Many times', says Dr. Dobbins, author of *How to be an Authentic Christian*, 'we as professed Christians are



By Prof. Michael Ogunu

great warriors. But as we grow in relationship with Christ, we learn how to trust God. We learn how to commit things to Him in prayer and we find that he is faithful to respond to our prayers'. Solomon said "Trust in the Lord with all thine hearts, and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

Yet another characteristic of the authentic Christian is his **faithfulness to daily duty**, that is, the duty of one's state in life. The authentic Christian does not neglect his duty but does it faithfully as enjoined by Paul in Col. 3:23-24 when he says "whatever you do, do it with all your heart as though you were working for God and not for men ... for Christ is the real master you serve".

In 1943, Venerable Sr. Lucia, one of the three shepherd children to whom Our Lady appeared in Fatima in 1917 and revealed many secrets of eternal salvation and world peace said that our Lord told her that "the sacrifice required of every person is the observance of God's law and the faithful fulfillment of one's daily duty". From the first moment of Our Lady's meeting with the little shepherd, the Virgin of Fatima spoke directly to them of this serious duty of every Christian. Neglect of business and domestic duties under pretext of piety is a fairly common fault. Devotees, especially of the female sex, often fall into this error, and so give scandal even to sensible and really religious people. Yet it is not piety that is to blame, but rather their self-will which is followed instead of the spirit of God.

Many have no sooner taken up the practices of religion than they start neglecting their homes, their children, and those dependent upon them. They spend the day going to church, in running after popular preachers, attending every religious service and special festival, and in undertaking all manner of good works. They are to be found everywhere except at home, which they leave as early, and return to as late, as possible.

Meanwhile, all is disorder in the household; everyone does as he pleases in the absence of the mistress. Children are left to the doubtful care of those who themselves want looking after; or they are dragged about, especially if girls, from service to service, until they are wearied out and disgusted, and soon begin to tire of religion. The husband very rightly complains, but his word is not heeded, and he is secretly accused of not being sufficiently devout. And thus it is, too, with many men. They are active, bustling busybodies; meddling in everything under the pretext of serving God; fancying that the Church depends on them. They concern themselves with the affairs of others, and neglect their own. Even some priests are not entirely exempt from these and similar faults. They are zealous, but, as St. Paul says, not according to knowledge. They allow their natural activity full rein, and because their ministry is spread over many objects, insinuate themselves into everything and imagine that all good works must pass through their hands, otherwise they will not succeed. They are for ever coming and going, and the day is not long enough for all they have to do. They even borrow from the night, and leave themselves barely time to say their office.

Another characteristic of an authentic Christian is **chastity and purity of heart**. Describing the value of chastity, God Himself says in Ecclesiasticus 26:20 that "no price is worthy of a continent soul". All that man prizes and esteems, riches, pleasures, honours, bear no comparison to a continent soul. St. Ephrem calls chastity "the life of the spirit". St. Peter Damian styles it "the queen of virtues", and St. Cyprian says by means of chastity we celebrate the most glorious triumphs. He who conquers the vice opposed to this virtue will easily triumph over the rest. On the contrary, he who permits himself to be ruled by incontinency (impurity) falls an easy prey to the other vices such as hatred, injustice, etc. Chastity, says St. Ephrem, renders us in a certain sense like angels. This comparison is altogether justified, for the life of angels is far from being a life of carnal gratifications.

Angels are pure by nature; chaste souls are pure by reason of virtue. "On account of the merit of this virtue", says Cassian, "human beings are placed on a level with the angels". "Of course there is a difference", says St. Bernard, "between the chaste man and the angel, but it is not a difference of virtue; it is only one of happiness. If the chastity of the angels is more blessed, the chastity of man is more courageous".

Our body is the most powerful weapon the devil possesses to make us his slaves. On this account it is seldom that a man comes forth victorious from this conflict. "The struggle for chastity", says St. Augustine, "is the most violent of all; the battle is renewed every day, and victory is rare". "How many unfortunate persons there are", says St. Lawrence Justinian, "who having spent long years in solitude amid prayer, fasting and mortification, yielded at last to sensuality, gave up their holy life, and with the loss of chastity suffered the loss of God".

Love of God and neighbour is yet another significant hallmark of an authentic Christian. It is impossible to love the Lord our God without at the same time loving our neighbour. The commandment that obliges us to love our God, obliges us also to love our neighbour. "And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God, love also his brother" (1 John 4:21). From these words of the Apostle, St. Thomas Aquinas concludes that the one virtue of love embraces the love of God and the love of our neighbour. St. Jerome tells us that when the disciples of St. John the Evangelist asked him why he spoke so often of brotherly love, he replied: "Because it is the commandment of the Lord, and the fulfilment of this alone is sufficient for eternal salvation". St. Catherine of Genoa once said to Our Lord: "O my God, Thou commandest me to love my neighbour, and I can love no one but Thee". Our Saviour replied: "My daughter, whoever loves Me loves everything that is loved by Me". Why, therefore, must we love our neighbour? Because he is loved by God. St. John was therefore right when he called him a liar who says that he loves God but hates his neighbour. Our Lord has promised that He will regard as done to Himself what we do for the least of our brethren: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). From this St. Catherine of Genoa concludes: "If you wish to know how much a person loves his God, see how much he loves his neighbour".

A very important duty of charity towards our neighbour consists in giving him alms when he is poor and needy and we ourselves are in a position to do so:

"He that hath mercy on the poor", says the Holy Spirit, "lendeth to the Lord; and he will repay him" (Prov. 19:17). If we can do nothing else let us at least recommend him to God, for prayer is also an alms. "He that shall see his brother in need", says St. John, "and shall shut up his heart against him, how doth the charity of God abide in him" (1 John 3:17). "With what measure you meet it shall be measured to you", says our Blessed Redeemer (Matt. 7:2). St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi said she would feel happier by assisting her neighbour than if she were raised to heavenly contemplation: "If I am in contemplation", said she, "God is helping me; if I assist my neighbour I am helping God". This is very true, for Our Lord Himself said: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren you do to me" (Matt. 25:40).

Closely allied to the preceding characteristic is being **charitable towards our enemies**. "Love your enemies", says Our Lord, "do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44). How sad it is to see Christians who go to Church and even to Holy Communion and still retain enmity in their hearts! If anyone has injured us, and we wish to revenge, we should try to act as the saints have done. St. Paulinus tells us that to love one's enemy is a heavenly revenge. St. Catherine of Siena took revenge on a woman who had attacked her honour, and this was her revenge: During a long and severe illness which the woman suffered, St. Catherine waited on her as a servant. St. Acacius sold his possessions in order to assist a man who had robbed him of his good name. St. Ambrose supported a man who had made an attempt on his life.

The authentic Christian practices the virtue of **obedience and trustful surrender to Divine Providence**. "You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you" (John 15:14) Perfection consists in the conformity of our will to the will of God.

The greatest sacrifice that a soul can make to God is obedience to Him; for as, in the opinion of St. Thomas, "nothing is dearer to us than the liberty of our will", we can offer to God no more acceptable gift than this very liberty. "Obedience is better than sacrifice", says the Holy Spirit (1 Kings 15:22); that is to say, God prefers obedience to all other sacrifices. He who gives his property to God by distributing it among the poor; his honor, by patiently bearing contempt; his body, by fasts and penitential works, gives Him a part of himself. But he who offers God his will, by subjecting it to obedience, gives Him all he has, and can truly say: "My Lord, after I have given Thee my will, I have nothing more to give". As St. Gregory says: "By the other virtues we give to God what belongs to us; by obedience we give Him ourselves". The same saint teaches that all the other virtues follow in the train of obedience and by its influence are preserved in the soul.

Chelles: Mutiu Adepoju, Dudu-Orumen Speaks On New Eagles Coach



Football analyst Godwin Dudu-Orumen has said that the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) has made a mistake by hiring former Mali coach, Eric Chelles.

The announcement of Chelles' new assignment, made on Tuesday by the NFF, marks the beginning of what is hoped to be a transformative chapter for Nigeria's national football team ahead of the challenging World Cup qualifiers.

His tactical acumen and international exposure are expected to bolster the Super Eagles as they prepare for a crucial phase in their campaign.

The immediate task ahead for Chelles will be Nigeria's 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, with key matches against Rwanda and Zimbabwe slated for March.

However, his appointment has been met with mixed reactions from

fans and football analysts. While some see his arrival as an opportunity for fresh ideas, others have criticised the timing and selection process.

On his part, Dudu-Orumen said that the NFF has not made the right decisions, as there are many coaches available in the nation, and it is absurd that the football ruling body has abandoned local coaches.

He said, "How will the NFF leave our former players

and go and bring a former Mali coach? I have said that the Amaju Pinnick style of interference in the NFF is still ongoing because he's looking out for those who would be supporting his kind of leadership in the NFF. This is how he brought Ibrahim Gusau in as the NFF chairman so that things can go along his plans."

Dudu-Orumen said that the Super Eagles deserve a world-class coach, and if the

NFF were to go for a coach, then ex-Eagles players who have been trained by FIFA should be tasked with the job.

He said, "Nigeria is a big footballing nation, and we have ex-players and coaches who can handle the national team."

"If we want an African coach, we have them in the former Eagles players who have gone for coaching courses."

Mutiu Adepoju, former Super Eagles midfielder, stated that what is most important is that any coach the NFF picks should just do the job. He added that Chelles should make sure that the Super Eagles do their best and qualify for the World Cup.

He said, "The NFF has chosen him (Eric) to manage the Eagles; he just has to do the job and qualify the team for the World Cup."

Track Queen: Julien Alfred outshines Sha'Carri Richardson in another monumental sprint list as 2025 season kicks off



10 African Countries Set for IBB Ladies Amateur Golf Tourney



No fewer than 400 golfers from about 10 African countries are set to battle for honours in the 26th edition of the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) Amateur Ladies Open in Abuja.

The tournament is scheduled to hold from February 13 to 17, 2025, at the IBB International Golf and Country Club, Abuja. Lady Captain of the club, Dame Julie Donli, revealed that this year's tournament, themed: "The Abuja Experience," promises to be unforgettable.

She said the Abuja experience would include city tour and cultural displays, adding that couture from northern Nigeria, as well as cuisines and delicacies that would captivate and impress guests would be displayed.

"All is now set for the Ladies Section of the IBB International Golf and Country Club, Abuja to host the 26th edition of the IBB Amateur Ladies Open.

"We are expecting no fewer than 400 golfers, ladies and gentlemen who will be playing as guests from within the country as well as from other African countries.

"It is going to be an Open to remember as we will be showcasing our culture, dressing, food, drink, music and a good taste of our hospitality. We will be welcoming all our players in a special way and taking them on a tour around the city, which promises to be fun and exciting."

Donli continues: "The beautiful thing about the championship is that it starts on Valentine's Day, which is February 14, so there is going to be so much love in the air."

She revealed that so far, about 10 African countries have indicated interest in participating in the championship, with over 400 players expected from across the country and the

rest of the world. She listed some of the participating countries to include Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, Cameroon, and the hosts Nigeria.

The Lady Captain assured that everything had been put in place to ensure an exciting outing for all the participants, with several side attractions lined up for the five-day event.

She noted that the championship is important because it had the World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR), adding that the professionals would also take part in the tournament with so many mouth-watering prizes to be won.

"The championship will feature a female professional tournament with a \$5,000 prize money. The Amateur championship boasts a return ticket to the UK, and an all-expense paid weekend stay at the Ibom Golf Resort in Uyo, along with other interesting prizes. It will be preceded by a caddies and course workers' competition which is the first of its kind," she stated. Donli stated that registration for the tournament would close on January 24.

The accomplishments of Saint Lucia's golden girl Julien Alfred keep reaching new heights, with a recent feat showing her excellence over Sha'Carri Richardson as the 2025 season kicks off.

Alfred blazed to world recognition when she won the Paris Olympics 100m gold medal over the American sprint queen Richardson in Paris, clocking a lifetime best of 10.72s.

She also added the World Indoor 60m and Diamond League titles in the 2024 season, thus ending the year as the undisputed queen of the

women's sprint.

Despite Alfred's medal-winning feats, she also backed it up with blistering times that stood tall among the female sprinters last year, one which includes the 60m event.

Her personal best of 6.94s is joint with Aleia Hobbs as the second-fastest time in history, behind Irina Privalova's world record of 6.92s and ahead of American icons Gail Devers (6.95s) and Marion Jones (6.95s).

With the 2025 indoor season already kicked off, Alfred will be gunning to break the long-

standing world record, as well as defend her world indoor title in March.

However, it remains to be seen if Richardson will compete indoors as she has never competitively raced the 60m before, hence doesn't have an official recorded time in the event.

Nonetheless, her ignited rivalry with Alfred can foresee the world 100m champion deciding to race in the event this year, so as to perfect all her phases and be in perfect shape ahead of defending her world title in Tokyo this summer.

Fans Slam NFF For Appointing Chelle As Super Eagles Coach

Football fans in Abuja have expressed disappointment over the appointment of former Mali coach Eric Chelle as the new Head Coach of the Super Eagles.

Some of the fans who spoke with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Abuja on Wednesday said that the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) should have retained the coaching crew lead by Augustine Eguavoen.

NAN reports that, NFF appointed Chelle as the new head coach of the Super Eagles of Nigeria on Tuesday to guide the nation to pick a 2026 FIFA World Cup ticket.

Adindu Udeh, a football fan said that the appointment of a new coach at this point in time was not necessary considering the short period to the World Cup qualifier.

He was of the opinion that, NFF should have supported Eguavoen to lead the Home base Eagles to CHAN tournament and through the World Cup qualifier.

Another enthusiast Jude Obasi said he was shocked at the announcement and would have preferred an indigenous coach.

"We don't really know what the former Malian coach will bring to the table, but I prefer the indigenous coaches because they understand the terrain."

"What will be our benefit if the new coach fails to take us to the 2026 World Cup finals, because I know it is going to be difficult considering Nigeria's position on the table," he said.



Mercy Udekwe said the change is necessary but should not have been an African coach but a European with years of experience.

"This NFF action for me will demoralise our home grown coaches, at a time other African countries are trusting their coaches, we are taking our coaches for granted," she said.

Chimaobi Ihezue however said he was not against the appointment of a new coach, but concerned about Nigeria's qualification for the forthcoming World Cup in 2026.

"If Chelle will take us to the world cup, let us support him," Ihezue said.

NAN reports that Chelle, who won five caps for the Aiglons of Mali and coached clubs such as GS Consolat, FC Martignes, Boulogne and MC Oran, has been Head Coach of the Aiglons since 2022.

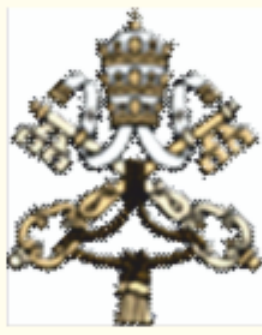
The 47-year-old featured for Martignes, Valenciennes, Lens, Istres and Chamois Niortais in France during his playing career.



PAX

Newspaper

...Peace on earth to men of goodwill



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Message Of His Holiness POPE FRANCIS FOR THE LVIII WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1st JANUARY 2025

Forgive Us Our Trespasses: Grant Us Your Peace

I. Listening To The Plea Of An Endangered Humanity

1. At the dawn of this New Year given to us by our heavenly Father, a year of Jubilee in the spirit of hope, I offer heartfelt good wishes of peace to every man and woman. I think especially of those who feel downtrodden, burdened by their past mistakes, oppressed by the judgment of others and incapable of perceiving even a glimmer of hope for their own lives. Upon everyone I invoke hope and peace, for this is a Year of Grace born of the Heart of the Redeemer!

2. Throughout this year, the Catholic Church celebrates the Jubilee, an event that fills hearts with hope. The "jubilee" recalls an ancient Jewish practice, when, every forty-ninth year, the sound of a ram's horn (in Hebrew, *jobel*) would proclaim a year of forgiveness and freedom for the entire people (cf. *Lev* 25:10). This solemn proclamation was meant to echo throughout the land (cf. *Lev* 25:9) and to restore God's justice in every aspect of life: in the use of the land, in the possession of goods and in relationships with others, above all the poor and the dispossessed. The blowing of the horn reminded the entire people, rich and poor alike, that no one comes into this world doomed to oppression: all of us are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father, born to live in freedom, in accordance with the Lord's will (cf. *Lev* 25:17, 25, 43, 46, 55).

3. In our day too, the Jubilee is an event that inspires us to seek to establish the liberating justice of God in our world. In place of the ram's horn, at the start of this Year of Grace we wish to hear the "desperate plea for help" that, like the cry of the blood of Abel (cf. *Gen* 4:10), rises up from so many parts of our world – a plea that God never fails to hear. We for our part feel bound to cry out and denounce the many situations in which the earth is exploited and our neighbours oppressed. These injustices can appear at times in the form of what Saint John Paul II called "structures of sin", that arise not only from injustice on the part of some but are also consolidated and maintained by a network of complicity.

4. Each of us must feel in some way responsible for the devastation to which the earth, our common home, has been subjected, beginning with those actions that, albeit only indirectly, fuel the conflicts that presently plague our human family. Systemic challenges, distinct yet interconnected, are thus created and together cause havoc in our world. I think, in particular, of all manner of disparities, the inhuman treatment meted out to migrants, environmental decay, the confusion willfully created by disinformation, the refusal to engage in any form of dialogue and the immense resources spent on the industry of war. All these, taken together, represent a threat to the existence of humanity as a whole. At the beginning of this year, then, we desire to heed the plea of suffering humankind in order to feel called, together and as individuals, to break the bonds of injustice and to proclaim God's justice. Sporadic acts of philanthropy are not enough. Cultural and structural changes are necessary, so that enduring change may come about.

II. A Cultural Change: All Of Us Are Debtors

5. The celebration of the Jubilee spurs us to make a number of changes in order to confront the present state of injustice and inequality by reminding ourselves that the goods of the earth are meant not for a privileged few, but for everyone. We do well to recall the words of Saint Basil of Caesarea: "Tell me, what things belong to you? Where did you find them to make them part of your life? ... Did you not come forth naked from the womb of your mother? Will you not return naked to the ground? Where did your property come from? If you say that it comes to you naturally by luck, you would deny God by not recognizing the Creator and being grateful to the Giver". Without gratitude, we are unable to recognize God's gifts. Yet in his infinite mercy the Lord does not abandon sinful humanity, but instead reaffirms his gift of life by the saving forgiveness offered to all through Jesus Christ. That is why, in teaching us the "Our Father", Jesus told us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses" (*Mt* 6:12).

6. Once we lose sight of our relationship to the Father, we begin to cherish the illusion that our relationships with others can be governed by a logic of exploitation and oppression, where might makes right. Like the elites at the time of Jesus, who profited from the suffering of the poor, so today, in our interconnected global village, the international system, unless it is inspired by a spirit of solidarity and interdependence, gives rise to injustices, aggravated by corruption, which leave the poorer countries trapped. A mentality that exploits the indebted can serve as a shorthand description of the present "debt crisis" that weighs upon a number of countries, above all in the global South.

7. I have repeatedly stated that foreign debt has become a means of control whereby certain governments and private financial institutions of the richer countries unscrupulously and indiscriminately exploit the human and natural resources of poorer countries, simply to satisfy the demands of their own markets. In addition, different peoples, already burdened by international debt, find themselves also forced to bear the burden of the "ecological debt" incurred by the more developed countries. Foreign debt and ecological debt are two sides of the same coin, namely the mindset of exploitation that has culminated in the debt crisis. In the spirit of this Jubilee Year, I urge the international community to work towards forgiving foreign debt in recognition of the ecological debt existing between the North and the South of this world. This is an appeal for solidarity, but above all for justice.

8. The cultural and structural change needed to surmount this crisis will come about when we finally recognize that we are all sons and daughters of the one Father, that we are all in his debt but also that we need one another, in a spirit of shared and diversified responsibility. We will be able to "rediscover once for all that we need one another" and are indebted one to another.

III. A Journey Of Hope: Three Proposals

9. If we take to heart these much-needed changes, the Jubilee Year of Grace can serve to set each of us on a renewed journey of hope, born of the experience of God's unlimited mercy. God owes nothing to anyone, yet he constantly bestows his grace and mercy upon all. As Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century Father of the Eastern Church, put it in one of his prayers: "Your love, Lord, is greater than my trespasses. The waves of the sea are nothing with respect to the multitude of my sins, but placed on a scale and weighed against your love, they vanish like a speck of dust". God does not weigh up the evils we commit; rather, he is immensely "rich in mercy, for the great love with which he loved us" (*Eph* 2:4). Yet he also hears the plea of the poor and the cry of the earth. We would do well simply to stop for a moment, at the beginning of this year, to think of the mercy with which he constantly forgives our sins and forgives our every debt, so that our hearts may overflow with hope and peace.

10. In teaching us to pray the "Our Father", Jesus begins by asking the Father to forgive our trespasses, but passes immediately to the challenging words: "as we forgive those who trespass against us" (cf. *Mt* 6:12). In order to forgive others their trespasses and to offer them hope, we need for our own lives to be filled with that same hope, the fruit of our experience of God's mercy. Hope overflows in generosity; it is free of calculation, makes no hidden demands, is unconcerned with gain, but aims at one thing alone: to raise up those who have fallen, to heal hearts that are broken and to set us free from every kind of bondage.

11. Consequently, at the beginning of this Year of Grace, I would like to offer three proposals capable of restoring dignity to the lives of entire peoples and enabling them to set them out anew on the journey of hope. In this way, the debt crisis can be overcome and all of us can once more realize that we are debtors whose debts have been forgiven.

First, I renew the appeal launched by Saint John Paul II on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 to consider "reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations". In recognition of their ecological debt, the more prosperous countries ought to feel called to do everything possible to forgive the debts of those countries that are in no condition to repay the amount they owe. Naturally, lest this prove merely

an isolated act of charity that simply reboots the vicious cycle of financing and indebtedness, a new financial framework must be devised, leading to the creation of a global financial Charter based on solidarity and harmony between peoples.

I also ask for a firm commitment to respect for the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, so that each person can cherish his or her own life and all may look with hope to a future of prosperity and happiness for themselves and for their children. Without hope for the future, it becomes hard for the young to look forward to bringing new lives into the world. Here I would like once more to propose a concrete gesture that can help foster the culture of life, namely the elimination of the death penalty in all nations. This penalty not only compromises the inviolability of life but eliminates every human hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.

In addition, following in the footsteps of Saint Paul VI and Benedict XVI, I do not hesitate to make yet another appeal, for the sake of future generations. In this time marked by wars, let us use at least a fixed percentage of the money earmarked for armaments to establish a global Fund to eradicate hunger and facilitate in the poorer countries educational activities aimed at promoting sustainable development and combating climate change. We need to work at eliminating every pretext that encourages young people to regard their future as hopeless or dominated by the thirst to avenge the blood of their dear ones. The future is a gift meant to enable us to go beyond past failures and to pave new paths of peace.

IV. The Goal Of Peace

12. Those who take up these proposals and set out on the journey of hope will surely glimpse the dawn of the greatly desired goal of peace. The Psalmist promises us that "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss" (*Ps* 85:10). When I divest myself of the weapon of credit and restore the path of hope to one of my brothers or sisters, I contribute to the restoration of God's justice on this earth and, with that person, I advance towards the goal of peace. As Saint John XXIII observed, true peace can be born only from a heart "disarmed" of anxiety and the fear of war.

13. May 2025 be a year in which peace flourishes! A true and lasting peace that goes beyond quibbling over the details of agreements and human compromises. May we seek the true peace that is granted by God to hearts disarmed: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world.

14. Disarming hearts is a job for everyone, great and small, rich and poor alike. At times, something quite simple will do, such as "a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed". With such gestures, we progress towards the goal of peace. We will arrive all the more quickly if, in the course of journeying alongside our brothers and sisters, we discover that we have changed from the time we first set out. Peace does not only come with the end of wars but with the dawn of a new world, a world in which we realize that we are different, closer and more fraternal than we ever thought possible.

15. Lord, grant us your peace! This is my prayer to God as I now offer my cordial good wishes for the New Year to the Heads of State and Government, to the leaders of International Organizations, to the leaders of the various religions and to every person of good will. Forgive us our trespasses, Lord, as we forgive those who trespass against us. In this cycle of forgiveness, grant us your peace, the peace that you alone can give to those who let themselves be disarmed in heart, to those who choose in hope to forgive the debts of their brothers and sisters, to those who are unafraid to confess their debt to you, and to those who do not close their ears to the cry of the poor.

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