

ADDRESSAT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF THE CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA

By
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Secretary General
CSN
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Protocol

I warmly welcome you to this year's Annual General Meeting. Your presence here, despite the sacrifices it required, is a clear sign of your deep commitment to the Church and to the apostolate entrusted to you.

The chosen theme, *"Harbingers of Hope: Mainstreaming Catholic Social Teaching for Development in Nigeria,"* is, for the CSN, a true TPC, that is, a theme of particular concern. At the Secretariat, we have incorporated the Social Doctrine of the Church into the regular formation of our staff, with the hope of extending this formation beyond the CSN. We do so because its principles are indispensable for sound administration, good governance, social transformation, and the building of a civilisation of love. In line with this, textbooks on CST for Nursery, Primary, and Secondary Schools across Nigeria are currently being developed. By embedding CST in the earliest stages of learning, we are laying the foundation for long-term national renewal, forming citizens and leaders capable of building a just and peaceful society. This is our own practical way of being a harbinger of hope, using the CST. We are grateful to our Education Unit for this initiative.

Our meeting takes place at a very critical moment in our nation's history. It is a time marked by widespread killings, abductions and banditry. The debate over whether these killings amount to genocide continues to polarise public discourse. While terminology matters, what is far more important is what is essential, which is the safety of everyone within the Nigerian territory. As the CBCN stated in their message yesterday, "Rather than engaging in divisive arguments about who has suffered more losses, we should stand together in defending the sacredness of every human life and protecting the vulnerable." This call is firmly rooted in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching: the sanctity of every human life, the common good and solidarity. The Catholic Church is never parochial in outlook. She is a mother who, as a harbinger of hope, seeks the good of all, regardless of religion, tribe or social status.

In the face of these national challenges, your work acquires even greater importance. You stand closest to the communities most affected by violence and insecurity, and it is through your interventions that the Church's commitment to the dignity of every human life becomes tangible. You are the first responders of the Church's social mission, and your courage and compassion are indispensable for the healing of our nation. Whatever can be done to foster peace must never be neglected, and your role in this regard is vital, for no matter how sound the strategies of the CBCN may be, they bear little fruit without your cooperation. While the CBCN and CSN operate at the strategic level, you serve at the operational level where real change happens. I therefore urge you to take home the resolutions from this meeting and translate them into concrete and impactful actions for the good of the Church and for society.

Before concluding my address, let me encourage you to begin earnest preparations for the 2027 elections. Politicians are already preparing, and we cannot afford to be passive. With less than fifteen months remaining, this is the moment to intensify grassroots voter education, train and deploy competent election observers, and strengthen advocacy for electoral reforms that ensure transparency, real-time result transmission and accountability. The Church relies on your commitment to help safeguard the people's mandate. If you are committed to this cause, you will, indeed, be a true harbinger of hope to the nation.

Let me also remind you of a concrete Jubilee Year assignment that speaks directly to the JDPC's mandate. A Jubilee is a time of restoration, reconciliation and the liberation of those in captivity. Many remain in detention for bailable offences simply because they lack the means to secure their freedom. Addressing this challenge belongs rightly to the JDPC, working in collaboration with the Association of Catholic Lawyers. Some dioceses are already engaged in this work, and I encourage others to embrace it as a meaningful expression of the Jubilee Year of Hope. This is another practical way of being harbingers of hope. Let us not only secure release but also support reintegration through skills training, livelihood support and pastoral care. Let the Jubilee reach our prisons through your hands.

I commend the Director of the Department, Fr. Peter Babangida Audu, the Secretaries of the various units, our partners and all staff of the Catholic Secretariat and Caritas Nigeria whose efforts have made this gathering possible. In a very special way, I am grateful to His Grace, Most Rev. Alfred Martins and Bishop Sylvester Gopep for coming for this event. Your presence means a lot to us.

May God bless you all and make fruitful your labours of love. Amen.

Once again, welcome, and thank you for your attention.