

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE  
GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE  
AT THE END OF ITS ANNUAL PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
HELD IN TECHIMAN IN THE BRONG AHAFO REGION OF GHANA  
NOVEMBER 9 – 16, 2018

**Greetings**

*Grace and peace from God our Father “who has chosen each one of us to be holy and blameless before him in love”, be with you all (cf. Ephesians. 1:4).*

**Preamble**

We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have held our Annual Plenary Assembly at Our Lady of Calvary Pastoral and Social Center, Asueyi, Techiman in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana from November 9 to 16, 2018. It was under the theme: “***Our call to holiness in the light of Gaudete et Exsultate***”, motivated by the recent Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today's World. In ***Gaudete et Exsultate*** (which literally means Rejoice and be Glad), our Holy Father expresses his modest goal *to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities.* (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate* #2).

**Congratulations to the Catholic Diocese of Techiman**

We congratulate our brother Most Rev. Dominic Yeboah Nyarko, the Priests, Consecrated Men and Women and the entire Faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Techiman on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of the diocese.

We pray for the growth of the faith and for the Bishop and his collaborators as they exercise their shepherding roles over the people entrusted to their care. We also encourage the faithful to continue their invaluable support to ensure the building of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of holiness.

**Acknowledgement**

We had the opportunity to visit and interact with the Omanhene of the Techiman Traditional Area, Oseadeayo Nana Akumfi Ameyaw IV, his sub-Chiefs and Queenmothers, the Deputy Minister for Regional Reorganisation and Development, Hon. Martin Agyei-Mensah Korsah, the Municipal Chief Executive of Techiman South, Hon. John Donyina, the District Chief Executive of Techiman North, Hon. Peter Mensah, the MCE for Kintampo North, Hon. Michael Sarkodie Baffoe, and some members of their Coordinating Councils.

We visited and interacted with the people of God in many parishes of the Diocese. Our Plenary was also graced by the Secretary to the Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana, Very Rev. Msgr. Pavol Talapka. We also met with a team from the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), led by its Executive Director, Dr. Emmanuel O. Akwetey as well as the Technical Advisor for the implementation of the One District One Factory (1D1F) Programme, Mr. Kwame Antwi-Agyei.

In the light of our theme and in consideration of the socio-political situation of our country Ghana, we wish to share with you the following reflections.

### **Theme for Our Plenary**

Holiness is our call and is fundamentally a divine quality. From her earliest days the Catholic Church through her teachings has consistently held the truth that only God is holy. When God created the human person in his image and likeness, he meant to share this intrinsic divine attribute of holiness with him.

As we are aware, we could not fulfil this purpose of our existence, as we wandered away from God. But God in His love and mercy for our salvation never gave up on us. He kept inviting us, through His prophets, and finally through His Son, to be who we were created to be. Holiness is therefore the chief purpose for which we were created. It is the original vocation and assignment of the human race to radiate the holiness of God to the world. Thus, in our holiness, we truly rejoice and are glad.

### **Holiness of the Individual**

We are all called individually and collectively to holiness. In our context as Ghanaians, the Holy Father's Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, #9 requires of all Catholics, and people of good will, a deeper reflection on God's call to holiness. Indeed, to be called holy people, it is not enough just to know and speak about God. Holiness compels all, especially Christians, to follow the example of Christ, organizing their lives as a participation in the mystery of Christ.

Pope Francis directs our attention to the most ordinary ways in which the call to holiness finds expression and compels us to discover the meaning of this call in all spheres of life: social, religious, economic and political concerns among others, that constitute our reality as Ghanaians. We are entreated to focus our attention on the most ordinary experiences of daily life, which we most often overlook.

We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever and in whatever vocation we have found ourselves. We are being called upon to work with integrity and for the common good of the people we serve and not for our personal gain.

### **Signs of Holiness Today**

The Holy Father directs our attention to some important signs that must accompany holiness in our world today. Among the signs are perseverance in good deeds, patience and meekness. Others are joy, a sense of humour, boldness and passion, feeling connected to a community of believers and remaining in constant prayer. Through these values, we find strength to endure daily humiliations and persecutions, respecting the dignity of others, and rejecting all forms of selfishness. We also learn to make a distinction between true joy and worldly consumerism, which never brings full satisfaction.

Our faith emboldens us to courageously reach out to the world in Christian witness and love. Christianity, and holiness for that matter, is a way of life and not a happening or an event. Christians should not be afraid of holiness. We become holy by doing the ordinary things of daily life with the mind and attitude of Christ. In the words of Pope Francis, “*Sometimes we are granted, amid these little details [of life], consoling experiences of God*” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, #4).

As Ghanaians, some of the areas in which we can concretely respond to the call to holiness may include more action and less political rhetoric and critique, more civil courage and Christian moral citizenship, resolving ethnic divisions in parishes and work places, facing up to the truth, rebuilding the value of trust through honest relationships and dealings in politics, family life, school, and the workplace by doing ordinary things in extraordinary ways.

Above all, Pope Francis proposes constant prayer as a vital sign of holiness. Leading a saintly life is experienced through keeping closeness of relationship with the Lord, and prayer is the way to this relationship.

### **Holiness in the Light of the Teaching of the Divine Master: Living the Beatitudes**

We respond to the call to holiness by living the Beatitudes (cf. *Matthew 5:1-12*): poverty of heart, meekness and humility, righteousness, sorrowing with the sorrowful, being merciful, peaceful, and “accepting daily the path of the Gospel” with all its inconveniences.

For us, the Beatitudes emphasize the inalienable value that God attaches to every individual human life. Human life is holy; humans deserve utmost dignity and must be treated with care and respect. The standard for measuring our fidelity to the Beatitudes is how we treat the vulnerable in our midst. (cf. *Matthew 25:31-46*). We are encouraged in our search for holiness to appreciate the value of human life. In consequence, we urge the Government to expunge the death penalty from the law books as Pope Francis exhorts all Governments to do.

Politicians, Religious leaders, Traditional leaders and all in leadership positions have a grave responsibility to lead the way in making Ghana a society that always places high premium on the dignity of human life. Indeed, we have the onerous duty to eliminate from our society practices and social vices that devalue human dignity.

### **Bribery and Corruption**

We recognize Government's efforts in the political realm to address the sin of bribery and corruption in Ghana. The general situation, however, still remains undesirable and needs a more pragmatic approach to address this menace.

Corruption continues to permeate all sectors of society and the attitudes and actions that breed corruption seem to be consciously endorsed or unconsciously accepted as the norm. The immorality of bribery and corruption which ignore the ethical code of religion is on the rise in our country. We call on the citizens at all levels of society, particularly people of faith, to eschew attitudes, behaviours and actions that support, encourage and condone bribery and corruption.

We also call on Government, especially the President, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, to demonstrate in practical terms, his open statement of commitment to fighting corruption. We urge the Government to be committed to the provision made in the 2019 budget to fully resource the office of the Special Prosecutor to carry out its mandated responsibilities.

### **Irregular Migration**

Our meeting in Techiman offered us the opportunity to hear the lamentations of traditional and political authorities, the host Bishop and other stakeholders about the spate of irregular migration in Techiman, Nkoranza and the Brong Ahafo Region as a whole. Their observations are confirmed by statistics from Government Agencies such as the Ghana Immigration Service's Report which indicate that 4,092 Ghanaians have been repatriated from Libya in 2017. Out of this number, 1,562 were from the Brong Ahafo Region.

We are saddened by the unfortunate loss of lives in the desert and the Mediterranean Sea of young men and women embarking on these perilous journeys. We share the anxieties of families who have lost contact with their relatives, who left for these journeys, and pray for their safe return.

As part of our commitment to minimize the high level of migration in this part of our country, we have instructed Caritas Ghana, our Development and Relief Organization, to prioritize actions to address this menace in the Brong Ahafo Region and the entire country. Caritas Ghana is to provide relief and other essential services to those who have been caught up in this regrettable situation. This is also a practical response to the call to holiness.

We also encourage our Government to endeavour to implement the National Migration Policy and to support the Regional and International efforts towards addressing the issue of migration with a comprehensive Global Compact which is yet to be adopted.

### **Care for Our Environment**

We recall the old adage that “*cleanliness is next to godliness*”. Our holiness is belied by the increasing filth and obscene piles of discarded plastics, electronic waste materials and other objects that choke our gutters, streets, and other public places. We also note the southwards expansion of desert-conditions which has been heightened by indiscriminate bush burning, wanton destruction of our forests, water-bodies, sale of large tracts of our prime lands to commercial entities for unchecked exploitation for profits (i.e. Land Grabbing). This situation aggravates the poverty of the local people and even deprives them of their agricultural livelihoods.

We have observed that our country, and for that matter Techiman diocese, where we have held our Plenary, has huge potentials for agriculture and tourism but are only marginally utilized. *The One District One Factory (1D1F) Programme* can therefore facilitate the full actualization of these potentials.

The Church remains an active voice calling for moderation and regulation in the exploitation of our natural resources. We are taking concrete actions to address the problem of poor sanitation with our new Electronic Waste Management Project and urge Government to be firm in its plans to address the sanitation and environmental problems. We are very much aware of the Government’s ban on illegal mining also known as “Galamsey”. We commend the Government on this decision as the practice destroys our water bodies and the ecology.

However, in negotiating with the small scale miners for their return to mine, care must be taken not to revert to the “Galamsey” practice.

## **Youth Unemployment**

Holiness inspires action that responds to the cries of the poor and the vulnerable. There is no doubt that the situation of youth unemployment in the country has become a grave concern that requires urgent intervention.

We commend the Government's innovative flagship projects such as *Planting for Food and Jobs* and *the Nation Builders Corps* which seek to address the situation. It is however sad to note that many of the newly trained professionals such as teachers and nurses have also joined the long queue of unemployed youth waiting to be absorbed into the public sector. We are worried because we see the state of affairs as a potential for national insecurity and social instability. As a Church, we are committed to making a contribution to finding solutions through our new Social Impact Investment and Social Enterprises Initiatives. These initiatives aim to alleviate poverty through sustainable income generating projects.

## **Local Government Reforms**

Decentralization or effective Local Government System is the way to bring governance and its benefits to the people and enhance the participation of citizens in the governance process. We note with some satisfaction the efforts of the President and his government to create new regions and reform the local governance system to enhance the devolution of power and resources to the regions, the districts and the communities.

We believe that these reforms, if well implemented, will enhance inclusiveness, accountability, democracy and human dignity. We, therefore, urge all Ghanaians to continue to be law abiding, tolerant and committed to enable us build a free and more just society.

It is our prayer and hope that peace, tranquillity, stability and love, some of the signs of holiness, would prevail in the forthcoming regional and national referenda (December 2018 and September 2019 respectively). We also pray that these attributes would characterise our decentralized local governance and the transformational development of the country.

## **Delivery of Social Services**

We once again wish to commend the Government for its pro-poor social interventions. The Free Senior High School Policy and the attendant introduction of the Double-track system are creative solutions to serious problems of exclusion and inequality in access to education. We, however, call on Government to address the challenges associated with these social interventions.

We also note that there has been some improvement in reimbursement of claims for health services provided under the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). This

notwithstanding, there are still huge sums of unpaid arrears and we urge Government to work hard at further mitigating the situation to enhance the services provided at all health facilities.

### **The Financial Sector**

We are concerned about the recent turbulence and uncertainties in the Financial Sector in our country especially with respect to the Banking Sector. Most of these uncertainties are functions of a profit-only driven market economy, greed, cronyism, conflict of interest, unchecked corruption, impunity, etc. We commend the initiatives so far undertaken by Government to strengthen regulation with the view to sanitizing the sector and safeguarding the interest of clients. It is our hope that Government will follow up this initiative through monitoring to ensure that the desired effects are achieved. We also urge the regulators to consider all the safety-valves that will insulate persons and allied institutions that may be unnecessarily affected by this general policy direction. We cannot but call on Government to fulfil its obligation.

### **The Cry of the Poor**

We are encouraged to know that ours is one of the fastest growing economies in the world as indicated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Other studies and our own observations, however, show that there is still a widening gap between the rich and the poor.

In our experience, many in the urban and rural areas do not experience this economic growth in their everyday living experience. This is an unhealthy growth. We entreat Government as a matter of urgency to roll out the necessary programmes that will alleviate this growing trend of unequal wealth distribution in our country.

### **Education Delivery**

Education is the bedrock of development. It contributes to the holistic development of the person, spiritual and physical. We therefore continually partner Government in education delivery. It is in this light that we call on Government urgently not to only praise the Church in public places for her contributions in education, health, agricultural and social services. In addition to the deserved praises, we urge the Government to act concretely by signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding our educational partnership and other promises the party made in its own manifesto in 2016. This will be a sign of trust and honesty.

We also want to state clearly that Religious and Moral Education is a means that the Church has used over the years for character formation and transformation in our schools. We therefore urge Government not to marginalize the teaching of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in the syllabuses of our Junior and Senior High Schools.

We have observed with great disappointment the marginalization of RME and in some instances its total removal from the proposed curriculum of education and formation of students in our basic and senior high schools. We call on curricula reviewers not to sideline RME in the name of modernization. We ask for a genuine stakeholders' engagement in the development of a new educational curriculum for our schools.

### **Political Vigilantism**

We are very much concerned about the existence and emergence of many political vigilante groups in our country. These groups act with impunity and in disregard of the rule of law. They destroy property, terrorize and harm people perceived to be in the opposing camp.

Over the years, it is becoming clear that Government and the Security Agencies seem helpless when it comes to addressing the issue of political vigilantism. We condemn in no uncertain terms all forms of vigilantism and appeal to Government to take the necessary steps to immediately outlaw all these groups.

### **Conclusion**

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things’.* (Philippians 4:8).

May Mary Our Lady of Calvary intercede for us. Amen.

*Issued on Friday, November 16, 2018  
in the St. Paul Cathedral Church, Techiman  
in the Catholic Diocese of Techiman*

**MOST REV. PHILIP NAAMEH**  
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