

CATHOLIC CHURCH NEWS

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- **MODERN SLAVERY: A HIDDEN GLOBAL CRISIS**
- **YOUNG FAITH COMMUNICATORS SHARE THEIR PILGRIMAGE EXPERIENCE**
- **BINGA DEANERY LEADS IN SHOWING WORKS IN THE JUBILEE YEAR**
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From the editor's desk



Dear Reader

The month of February is dedicated to the Holy Family, a time to reflect on the family as the foundation of faith, love, and resilience.

The family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph faced hardships—homelessness, political persecution, life as refugees—yet they remained united in faith and trust in God's plan.

Their story is not just one of the past; it speaks powerfully to the struggles many families endure today.

Families today face immense challenges. The rising influence of LGBTQ ideologies and the gender identity crisis is reshaping societal values.

Traditional family structures are weakening. Technology and social media, while connecting the world, have distanced family members from each other.

Economic hardships, job losses, and migration are breaking families apart, as parents leave for foreign lands in search of greener pastures, only for relationships to crumble under the strain of distance.

This edition highlights an important step in strengthening family life—the launch of a Couples Association, a response to the growing need for strong, faith-based marriages.

This initiative aims to equip couples with spiritual and practical guidance to navigate the storms of life together, rather than falling apart under pressure.

Another silent crisis threatening families today is human trafficking.

Desperation drives many to trust in false promises of prosperity, only to end up in modern-day slavery—forced labour, sexual exploitation, or domestic servitude.

Zimbabwe is both a source and a transit country for trafficked persons, and many are unaware of the extent of the problem.

In this issue, we uncover the harrowing real-

ity of human trafficking, the voices of survivors, and the Church's call to action.

February also began with the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, a celebration of Christ, the Light of the World.

It is this light that we pray will shine upon struggling families, those trapped in human trafficking, and all who feel lost and abandoned.

Yet, hope is alive. While there is growing concern over youth disengagement from Church activities, as highlighted in one of the articles in this issue, not all is lost.

Many young Catholics are actively seeking deeper faith and connection.

This edition features inspiring stories of those who are still committed—youths embarking on pilgrimages to Ngome, gathering for Deanery Masses, and rediscovering the joy of faith through shared experiences.

The associations of the laity are also answering the call to deepen their commitment.

The Maria Hosi YeDenga leadership of the Archdiocese of Harare began their term with a spiritual retreat in Chinhoyi, while members of the Sodality of Our Lady in Bulawayo took their missionary pilgrimage to Ekuhlengweni.

These movements show that faith is alive, people are searching, and Christ is still calling us to Himself.

As we move through this month, let us draw inspiration from the Holy Family.

May their courage give us strength, their faith give us hope, and their love remind us that no matter the storm, families that cling to God will endure.

I wish you a prayerful and grace-filled Lenten season.

Happy reading, and may God bless you and your families!

Fr. Johnston Z. Mlambo

Modern slavery: a hidden global crisis

By Fr Johnston Mlambo



Sr. Theresa Nyadombo introduces victims and survivors of human trafficking.

A 2017 global study revealed 40 million people remain enslaved worldwide. By 2023, Free the Slaves organisation estimated this number had risen to 49.6 million.

While statistics provide scope, this figure may be seen as mere data by some, but each number represents a stolen life, shattered dreams, a missing relative, and lost dignity.

Human trafficking is a multibillion-dollar industry operating in the hidden corners of society, preying on the vulnerable. It is a form of modern slavery that includes:

- Forced Labour (55%) – Found in industries such as agriculture, mining, and domestic work.
- Forced Marriage (44%) – Victims, predominantly women and girls, are coerced into marriages against their will.

- Sex Trafficking (12.5%) – Individuals, including children, are exploited in the commercial sex industry.

- Child Exploitation (12%) – Children are forced into labour, servitude, or begging. Many Zimbabweans view human trafficking as a distant issue, yet the reality is grim. Zimbabwe serves as a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked individuals.

Victims are lured with false promises of employment and a better life, only to end up trapped in forced labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude.

Domestic trafficking remains a major concern, with girls and children being moved from rural areas to cities under false pretences. Many end up in brothels, street begging rings, or forced labour.

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On 8 February 2015, the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita, Pope Francis launched the Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking.

He described trafficking as a "scourge unworthy of society", calling on world leaders to take decisive action.

To mark the 10th anniversary of this initiative, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) joined global efforts to campaign and pray against human trafficking.

The event took place at St Peter's High School in Mbare, a suburb notorious for drug abuse and human exploitation.

Mbare was chosen as a symbolic venue, as victims are often trafficked there for sexual exploitation.

The day began with Holy Mass, followed by an awareness session led by Sr. Theresa Nyadombo, a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and ZCBC's National Coordinator for Safeguarding.

Participants reflected on the story of St. Josephine Bakhita, a Sudanese nun who endured slavery before finding freedom and dedicating her life to faith.

Sr. Nyadombo urged students to be vigilant and recognise the signs of trafficking.

One of the most powerful moments of the event was the testimonies of survivors.

Women who had been trafficked to the Middle East shared harrowing accounts of deception, abuse, and survival.

Nesta, a mother of two, was struggling to support her children when she was approached by a relative offering a job in Dubai. Trusting her family member, she accepted the offer.

"I only realised that my destination was not Dubai when I reached Ethiopia," she recalled. "My connecting flight was not to Dubai, but to Oman. When I arrived, a man holding my picture was there to take me."

She was forced into domestic servitude, working long hours for 21 people, with only one hour of rest per day. She was promised US\$500 per month, but only received US\$200.

Gladys was trafficked to Oman in 2022. She had hoped to earn a decent living but found herself in a nightmare.

"I was told I would be working as a nurse aide," she said. "But when I got there, I was forced to be a maid. I was promised US\$450, but received only US\$180."

She described how traffickers manipulated victims by rushing visa applications, discouraging too many questions, and avoiding details about job conditions.

"We were deceived," she admitted. "By the time I realised, it was too late."

Both women suffered physical, emotional, and psychological abuse before finally escaping.

Human trafficking thrives on poverty, unemployment, and corruption.

Many Zimbabweans are vulnerable to traffickers because of economic despair.

Instead of prioritising urgent socio-economic issues, political leaders are preoccupied with extending President Mnangagwa's term to 2030.

This focus on political survival overshadows pressing concerns like job creation, human rights protection, and social welfare.

Fortunately, President Mnangagwa has reiterated that he will not seek a third term nor extend his current term to 2030.

He told editors from various media houses on 17 February, "I will persuade the persuaders not to persuade me."

Human trafficking is one of the gravest human rights violations. It destroys lives, fuels organised crime, and undermines justice.

Government, civil society, and faith-based organisations must work together to combat this evil.

To fight trafficking, awareness must increase, laws must be enforced, and economic opportunities must be created.

Zimbabweans must remain vigilant, support victims, and demand accountability from leaders.

As Pope Francis reminds us:

"With the help of God, we can avoid becoming accustomed to injustice and ward off the temptation to think that certain phenomena cannot be eradicated."

The battle against modern slavery is far from over. But with faith, commitment, and collective action, we can restore dignity to the oppressed and bring an end to human trafficking.

No human being is for sale.





AMBASSADORS OF HOPE
together against human trafficking

message from Pope Francis

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

It is with joy that I join you on the 11th International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. This event falls on the liturgical commemoration of St Josephine Bakhita, a Suda-

nese woman and nun, who was a victim of trafficking as a child and has become a symbol of our commitment against this terrible phenomenon. In this jubilee year, let us also walk together, as 'pilgrims of hope', on the road against trafficking.



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But how is it possible to continue to nourish hope in front of the millions of people, especially women and children, young people, migrants and refugees, trapped in this modern slavery? Where do we get new impetus to combat the trade in human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of children and girls, forced labour, including prostitution, drug and arms trafficking? How do we experience all this in the world and not lose hope? It is only by lifting our eyes to Christ, our hope, that we can find the strength for a renewed commitment that does not allow itself to be overcome by the dimension of problems and dramas, but in the darkness strives to light flames of light, which together can illuminate the night until the dawn breaks. The young people around the world who are fighting against trafficking offer us an example: they tell us that we must become ambassadors of hope and act together, with tenacity and love; that we must stand by the victims and survivors. With the help of God, we can avoid becoming accustomed to injustice and ward off the temptation to think that certain phenomena cannot be eradicated. The Spirit of the Risen Lord sustains us in promoting, with courage and effectiveness, targeted initiatives to weaken and oppose the economic and criminal mechanisms that profit from trafficking and exploitation. He teaches us first of all to listen, with

closeness and compassion, to the people who have experienced trafficking, to help them get back on their feet and together with them to identify the best ways to free others and to do prevention. Trafficking is a complex, constantly evolving phenomenon, and is fuelled by wars, conflicts, famine and the consequences of climate change. It therefore requires global responses and a common effort, at all levels, to tackle it.

I therefore invite all of you, especially representatives of governments and organisations that share this commitment, to join us, animated by prayer, to promote initiatives in defence of human dignity, for the elimination of human trafficking in all its forms and for the promotion of peace in the world. Together - trusting in the intercession of St Bakhita - we can make a great effort and create the conditions for trafficking and exploitation to be banned and for respect for fundamental human rights to prevail, in fraternal recognition of common humanity. Sisters and brothers, I thank you for your courage and tenacity in carrying out this work, involving so many people of good will. Go forth with hope in the Lord, who walks with you! I bless you from my heart. I pray for you, and you pray for me.

Intention of the Holy Father



FEBRUARY

Let us Pray that the ecclesial community might welcome the desires and doubts of those young who feel a call to serve Christ's mission in the priesthood and religious life.

The Archdiocese of Bulawayo celebrates the Jubilee of armed forces, police, and security personnel

By Fr. Vusumuzi Golden Moyo



Members of the police perform at the celebrations.

Filled with jubilation, thanksgiving, and joyful hope, Catholic security service men and women gathered at the historic former Jesuit Mission monument, near the Kraal of King Lobengula on the outskirts of Bulawayo, to celebrate the Jubilee Year 2025 and reflect on their role in serving the nation with faith and integrity.

The event was organised by Fr. Charles Mafurutu, Chaplain of the Zimbabwe National Army, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services, and ZRP Fairbridge. The spiritual programme, held on Saturday, 8 February, was in line with the Catholic Calendar as proclaimed by Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year 2025.

The celebrations began with engaging reflections on the meaning and significance of the Jubilee, delivered by the Rector of St. Mary's Cathedral Minor Basilica, Rev. Fr. James Batsirai. The commemoration brought together security service personnel, their spouses, children, and friends under the theme "Pilgrims of Hope".

The large turnout of pilgrims was a testament to the fact that this year's pastoral theme is alive in the Archdiocese. Enduring the scorching sun, pilgrims demonstrated a shared sense of purpose: to support each other in prayer, commit to witnessing the faith, and uphold integrity and professionalism in serving their country.

The key speaker of the day, Fr. Batsirai, emphasised communion and active participation in embracing the spirit of the Jubilee Year. In the face of numerous challenges, he stressed the need to revive hope in one another, noting that true hope requires addressing social ills and implementing tangible solutions.

The host parishes, namely St. Christopher, St. Maximilian, and St. Ignatius, gave insightful presentations on the theme and the functions of each security branch. The Missionary Childhood Association educated pilgrims on the basic precepts of the Catholic faith.

During Holy Mass, the Archbishop of Bulawayo, Alex Thomas, focused on "Defending

the Catholic Faith." He commended the members of the uniformed forces for their service to the nation: "My dear people of God, I am pleased with the sacrifice and hard work you offer to the nation. Defending the country is not easy; at times, you make great sacrifices in obedience to your superiors. Be assured, your efforts do not go unnoticed—God will reward you in due time. Meanwhile, let us continue to pray for each other as one people of God."

Among the distinguished guests were senior officials from the police and defence forces, including Assistant Commissioner Gumbo of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, Major Nyika of the Zimbabwe National Army, Assistant Inspector Ndiripo of Fairbridge, and Chaplain Muponela from Khami Prison. Mr. Hwela of St. Maximilian - Khami expressed gratitude to the Archbishop for his unwavering support and prayers, remarking:

"This event enlightened us on the Jubilee theme of hope. Our service requires individuals who remain hopeful, as we encounter many challenges in our duties."

After the Eucharistic celebration, the Archbishop expressed his desire for the commemoration to become an annual event in the Archdiocese. His proposal was enthusiastically received, with the congregation responding with cheers, ululations, and whistles.

The pilgrimage concluded with a tour of the Old Bulawayo monument, a site that stands as a reminder of the deep-rooted Christian values shaping the Catholic community in Bulawayo. The event culminated in a heartwarming bring-and-share lunch, fostering camaraderie and a spirit of unity among pilgrims.



Armed forces intently follow proceedings



Armed forces actively participate



Fr. Vusimuzi takes a reading



Archbishop Alex Thomas delivers a homily



SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him" (Rom 15:13)

CHRIST, SOURCE OF HOPE, RECONCILIATION AND PEACE: A CALL TO PRAYER AND FASTING

MESSAGE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF SECAM TO THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

To you, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, the faithful of all our Catholic Dioceses in Africa and its islands, and to all people of goodwill: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We, the members of the Standing Committee of SECAM, gathered in Accra, Ghana, from February 11-14, 2025, for our first annual ordinary meeting, address you today with hearts filled with both concern and grief because of the ongoing conflicts in our Continent, nonetheless with Christian hope.

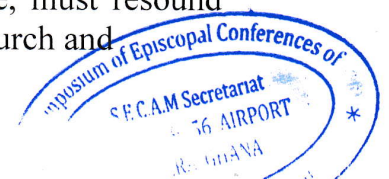
Current Situations of Concern

We know that Africa's rich mineral deposits, truly a potential source of prosperity, have instead continued to be a source of conflict. The desire to control and appropriate these resources motivates powerful nations and multinational corporations to fund armed factions in some African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Mozambique, Sudan, etc, thereby perpetuating violence, displacement and instability.

We acknowledge the immense suffering that many of our brothers and sisters are enduring due to conflicts, violence, massacres and instability in various parts of our continent. To all who are bereaved and suffering, we say: "you are not forgotten". The Church has not abandoned you. We stand with you, pray for you, and continue to call for justice, peace, and reconciliation. To those who persist in the scramble for the resources of Africa, we echo the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis, in his speech of January 2023 in Kinshasa, DRC: "Hands off the Democratic Republic of Congo! Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa, it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered".

Our Inspiration and Hope through Synodality

As we embrace this Jubilee Year as *Pilgrims of Hope*, we are reminded that even in the darkest times, hope must never fade. The Jubilee invites us to renew our trust in God, to strengthen the bonds of communion, and to seek new paths of healing and unity. The message of Christ, the Prince of Peace, must resound loudly in Africa. We urge all people of goodwill—within the Church and



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MADAGÁSCAR

SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

beyond—to be instruments of peace, choosing dialogue over division, love over hatred, and hope over despair.

If the Synod on Synodality ever had meaning, this is the time to demonstrate it. The call to *walk together* as a Church, listening to one another and acting in unity, must become a lived reality. The challenges before us compel us to greater collaboration among bishops, priests, religious, and the people of God everywhere. No one can stand alone; we are one body in Christ. As shepherds of the Church in Africa, we commit to strengthening the structures of communion and ensuring that the Church remains a voice of truth, justice, and hope in our society.

Our Passionate Call to Prayer

As followers of Christ, we are called to stand together in prayer for those in need and to seek God's intervention for peace and healing. We urge all believers to dedicate time for prayer, asking the Lord to bring an end to the war, to comfort the afflicted, and to guide our leaders toward justice and reconciliation. To this end, we invite every diocese, parish, and religious community in Africa to unite in a triduum of prayer and fasting, each according to their local customs and facilities, from March 3rd to 5th, 2025.

Let us lift up our voices to God in unity, trusting that He hears the cries of His people even as we all work fervently for peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) May the Lord grant peace to Eastern Congo and all other lands all regions suffering from conflict.

We entrust our continent, Africa, to the maternal care of Our Lady of Africa and invoke God's blessings upon all of you. May His peace reign in our hearts, in our homes, and in our nations. Amen.

Given in Accra, Ghana,
13th of February 2025

The Standing Committee of SECAM

+Fridolin Cardinal AMBONGO
President of SECAM





ZHOCD establishes provincial structures to strengthen church's grassroots impact

By Gabriel Kandewo

The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) has achieved a significant milestone with the establishment of provincial structures across the country.

This development marks a crucial step towards strengthening the Church's presence and impact at the grassroots level.

Provincial structures have now been established in Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East, Manicaland, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Matabeleland North, and Matabeleland South.

These structures will play a vital role in promoting peace, justice, and unity within their respective provinces.

They will also serve as a foundation for the establishment of district structures, further extending the Church's reach and influence.

The importance of these provincial structures cannot be overstated. They will enable the Church to better serve the people of Zimbabwe,

addressing the unique challenges and needs of each province.

By establishing a stronger presence at the provincial and district levels, the Church can more effectively promote the common good and human dignity.

The launch, which took place across multiple provinces, drew high-level dignitaries, including ZHOCD bishops.

Key attendees included Bishop Paul Horan, President of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Fr Tryvis Moyo, Secretary General of the (ZCBC), and Pastor Never Muparutsa, President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ).

Additionally, Rev Dimingu, Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Peter Makamba, President of the Union for the Development of the Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), and Bishop Ignatius Makumbe, President of ZCC were also in attendance.

In his remarks, Fr Tryvis Moyo emphasised the theological foundations behind the work of ZHOCD, highlighting the importance of making the Church relevant and accessible to the people.

"As the Church, we are called to serve the people, and our presence must be felt at all levels," he said.

Pastor Never Muparutsa, while commissioning the provincial committees, encouraged them to go forth and make disciples of all nations, guided by God in their work.

"You are the ambassadors of Christ, and your work must reflect the values of love, compassion, and justice," he said.

Rev Dinhinu, ZCC Secretary General, encouraged the provincial structures to be guided by the ZHOCD constitution and to always work closely with the national struc-

tures.

"Unity and coordination are key to our success, and we must work together to achieve our goals," he said.

The establishment of provincial structures is a major achievement for ZHOCD, which brings together four major Church organisations: the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), and the Union for the Development of the Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA).

With the successful launch of provincial structures nationwide, ZHOCD is poised to make a more meaningful impact on the lives of Zimbabweans, promoting the common good and human dignity at all levels.





Pilgrims from Harare pose for a photo at the shrine

Young Catholics on fire for faith: Harare Archdiocese youth pilgrimage to Ngome

By Tatenda Gift Maposa

The Archdiocese of Harare Youth and Vocations Ministry embarked on a spiritually enriching pilgrimage to the Ngome Marian Shrine – Tabernacle of the Most High – in South Africa, from 1 to 9 February 2024.

This sacred journey, organised in collaboration with Genesis Travel and Tours, was not merely a trip but a transformative experience aimed at renewing the faith of young people as they stepped into the year 2025.

It also served as part of their preparation for the much-anticipated Pilgrims of Hope event in Rome in 2025.

Upon arriving at the Ngome Marian Shrine, the pilgrims were welcomed into a place steeped in divine mystery and Marian devotion.

They were introduced to the remarkable story of Sister Reinolda May, a Benedictine nun, to whom the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared ten times.

These apparitions led to the establishment of the shrine at a site where seven natural springs converge – a place now known as Mary, Tabernacle of the Most High.

The shrine stands on four symbolic pillars:

1. The presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Mary as the Tabernacle of the Most High.
3. The healing waters from the seven springs.
4. Sister Reinolda May, the Servant of the Lord.

The story of Sister Reinolda's encounter with Mary stirred the hearts of the young pilgrims, inspiring them to open their souls to God's work in their own lives.

At the heart of the pilgrimage was prayer.

Each day was punctuated by moments of grace: the celebration of Holy Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction, the Rosary, and the Stations of the Cross.

These sacred practices formed the rhythm of the pilgrims' days, drawing them into deeper union with God.

One of the most profound moments was the renewal of baptismal vows—a solemn recommitment to their faith.

As they stood before God, the young people declared once more their desire to walk in the light of Christ.





The youth pilgrims express their excitement for the pilgrimage.

A healing session further touched the hearts of many.

Pilgrims were invited to surrender their burdens and wounds, trusting that the same God who healed the sick in Galilee was present to restore their spirits.

Many testified to experiencing inner peace and renewal, leaving Ngome as "new creations" filled with hope and joy.

Throughout the pilgrimage, thought-provoking reflections were woven into the experience.

Pilgrims were challenged to ask themselves: Why am I here as an individual?

What do I hope to gain from this pilgrimage? How will I live my faith when I return to my community?

These questions became catalysts for personal introspection.

Young people were encouraged to "let go and let God," trusting in His power to calm the storms of life.

They were reminded that the renewal they had received was not for themselves alone but to be shared – to become beacons of hope for others.

The pilgrimage was further enriched by a visit to Inkamana Abbey, home to Benedictine monks. Here, the pilgrims received spiritual guidance and listened to talks on faith and monastic life.

The encounter was marked by warmth and mutual joy, as young Catholics and monks

found common ground in their love for Christ.

The pilgrims also visited Sister Reinolda May's gravesite and were encouraged to pray for her beatification.

Standing at the resting place of the woman whose faith had inspired their journey, the young people felt a deeper connection to her story and her unwavering trust in God.

The pilgrimage extended beyond Ngome. The group travelled to Durban, where they visited the city's cathedral, toured local sites, and enjoyed the scenic beauty of the beachfront.

These experiences reminded the young people that faith is lived not only in moments of quiet prayer but also in the vibrancy of daily life.

Wherever they went, the sight of young people embracing their Catholic faith sparked joy and admiration.

It is often the elderly who embark on pilgrimages, but this group defied the norm.

Their presence was a witness – a reminder that the future of the Church is bright.

Local communities encouraged the young pilgrims to persevere.

"Do not tire," they said, "but continue the work of the Lord. Bring hope to others."

As the young pilgrims returned home, their message was clear: The faith is ours – we must take ownership of it.

Inspired by Pope Francis' *Christus Vivit*, which calls young people "the Now of God," they urged their peers to step forward.

Youth are not merely the Church of tomorrow; they are the Church of today.

Their challenge to others is simple but profound: Participate. Be present. Be a beacon of hope.

The pilgrimage to Ngome was not the end; it was a beginning. A call to every young Catholic:

Rise.

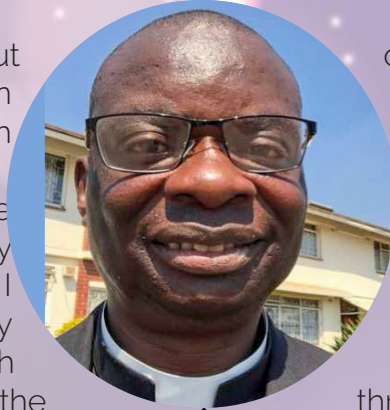
The Church needs you.

God is with you.

The time is now.

Unveiling shadows: youth disengagement from church.

By Fr Makamure



"Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith and in purity," (1 Tim4:12).

Inspired by these words of the Apostle Paul to the young Timothy I write this article to explore what I see as the critical and apparently overlooked problem in our church namely the dearth of youth in the church.

The church is called to play an essential role in the life of young people while the role and contribution of youth in the life of the church must also be recognised and encouraged as an essential part of our Christian identity.

Young people are one of the most dynamic sections of the church and society and are at a fascinating stage of life.

Youth is a stage when nurtured development, guidance and formation are important and even necessary.

It is an integral part of the mission of the church to find suitable and creative ways to lead the young people to Jesus Christ, the only one who has words of eternal life (John 6:68).

However, we are witnessing a worrying trend: the number of youth in our church is declining drastically.

Many are witnessing this anecdotally by seeing in almost every mass more adults than youths and statistics confirm it.

This trend is alarming and convicting if we consider the fact that the future of the church lies in these youths.

Young people are valuable.

One thing about values is that they die quietly.

The youth is not exceptional to this rule.

The young need to be tended and cultivated.

When tending is lacking they deteriorate.

Either we are tending them or they are deteriorating or dying.

We must look at the causes of youth disengagement from the Church.

This requires a hard look at how society is changing and how we are not responding to those

changes.

I am speaking from a sociological perspective and not claiming that it's the only perspective from which to view this challenge.

However, at the same time we seem to observe major shifts in the world and church unfolding rapidly and posing many challenges and threats to the flourishing young people and threatening the church itself.

We may say the causes are social media, poor parenting, poor catechesis, family breakdown, economic challenges etc. True these contribute but they don't do so in isolation.

I just want to focus here on a few trends that I see as common to young people and hint at the way the church needs to evolve in order to attract and support young people.

To fulfil our role as church to young people, we must have the courage and energy to meet these changes and engage young people themselves, understanding their perspectives, embracing their contributions and involving them more fully. My core assertion is that we must partner with young people in new ways and create space in our midst and in ourselves for them, giving them more room to initiate projects, supporting them, and giving them more decision making roles within our institutions and common spaces if we want young people present, active and flourishing.

What are these trends?

1. The impact of internet and social media. We have only begun to grasp the impact of the internet and social media on the formation of people, ideas and movements. Images are beginning to replace words as primary. And the words and images and ideas they carry are fast and brief.

A role reversal is underway: instead of adults guiding young people through the information and ideas and people that will form their character, the young people are pioneering the ground while most older people struggle to keep up or refuse to engage this new reality.



Part of the small group of youth pilgrims that visited Ngome

On the one hand, the internet levels have a playing field allowing every voice space and any voice to come to the fore, thereby challenging systems of power.

It gives people in remote places access to new information and it gives people easy access to "friends" around the world. On the other hand, of course, the internet gives uncontrolled access to images and information, some of which is unhealthy and degrading. Genuine community is taking place in this space, yet arguably it can have the effect of reducing some young people's ability to interact with ideas and people with the depth and complexity that they deserve.

We underestimate the influence of the internet and social media in turning the young away from the church but that is what it is exactly doing.

If we as adults often get distracted from prayer by it what about our youth whose preoccupation now is social media?

Like it or not the church needs to get into this space, learn from the young people and at the same time guide young people through it.

To grapple with its implications, younger and older people must engage a dialogue and discern together.

2. Globalization.

Globalization is influencing educational trends.

Educational institutions have become in-

creasingly privatised and commercialised in both developing and developed countries with the correlating increase in school fees for many.

There is pressure to finish school faster.

Education is becoming fiercely commodified: most students are encouraged to study narrowly defined subjects that reflect the current needs of the job market.

Globally there are more students in school but critical thinking and character formation are often not regarded as important goals.

The worldliness taught in schools compounded with not so good examples from adults make the church uninspiring among the young.

The young find that they have less time to involve themselves in church activities.

There is less time and less of a vision for community building and reflection.

Very often their choices are made primarily for pragmatic reasons.

They ask what will going to church help me now in my situation.

We need as a church to listen to the struggles of the young and the church must create spaces that allow the young for deeper engagement with reality.

3. The church is left behind.

An obvious and disturbing trend is that young people are leaving the church.

It is not because they are uninterested in God, spirituality or tradition.



Part of the very few youths who attended the Human Trafficking awareness campaigns



Mr. Harrington Chuma, Caritas National Coordinator, addresses the few youths who participated in a Church activity

Somehow, they no longer find the church a viable space to find and express their spirituality and need for meaningful engagement with others.

They will not stay with an institution simply out of habit or loyalty if they do not see meaning in it.

Some denizens of old generation interpret this as simply a new version of their own experience of rebellion against authority and adults.

But this is a mistake and will lead to ineffective outreach.

Young people now have a different relationship with institutions.

The institution itself is not a primary category in their lives.

There is no need to rebel.

They will simply not participate if they do not find something and someone that connects with their own personal realities.

Young people are looking for spirituality and faith that is relevant to their lives.

They will not respond to the church that is patronising, arrogant or disconnected.

The blessing of their insistence and their impatience is this: if we rise to the challenge, we will have no more people sitting in the pews who are there with a purpose.

If the church is declining in its role and relevance, perhaps the young people's call for

authenticity is key to stirring transformation in twenty first century society and individuals.

As always young people need education, formation and input from adults.

They know they do not have all the answers and they will accept such input when the approach is made in a spirit of accompaniment and listening, when they are given meaningful roles in the community and in the church, space to explore their own ideas and appreciation and when adults admit they do not have all the answers either and express vulnerability in their own lives.

The challenges in the church and the world are too fundamental to handle in isolation.

Inter-generational approaches are now not only desirable but necessary.

Young people understand themselves as agents of change and they will respond and participate with older adults and within institutional structures when the adults and institutions make space to include young people as real partners.

It is when we are building this kind of authentic community, which ultimately reflects the deep connection, love, and interdependence of the Triune God, that young people and all people will have the motivation, freedom and trust to listen for their calling and find their vocation.



Maria hosi yedenga guild leaders seek spiritual renewal at Mariachitubu Shrine

By Soccom Reporter

Members of Maria Hosi yeDenga guild with their spiritual advisor Sr. Francisca and their retreat facilitator Fr. Chambara

Harare — The top leadership of the Maria Hosi yeDenga guild in the Archdiocese of Harare gathered for a spiritually enriching recollection retreat at Mariachitubu Shrine in the Diocese of Chinhoyi from 15 to 16 February 2025.

This prayerful weekend followed the guild's leadership workshop held earlier at Rockwood Pastoral and Spiritual Centre, aimed at strengthening administrative and Christ-like leadership qualities.

Guided by the theme "Leading Pilgrims of Hope with Mary," the retreat was facilitated by Father Innocent Chambara from Chinhoyi Diocese.

Twenty-two Marian women

and one man attended the recollection, accompanied by their Spiritual Advisor, Sister Francisca Matongo.

The program commenced with a reflective prayer from Psalms 139 led by Father Chambara.

He emphasised the importance of recollection as a spiritual exercise defined as a "school of prayer" and a time to "take stock of our lives as Christians."

He reminded participants that silence is essential for listening to God's voice (1 Kings 19:11-12).

The first talk highlighted the guild's mission, rooted in Matthew 28:19-20, to spread the Gospel, promote repentance,

bear witness to Christ, and uplift the lives of fellow Christians.

Leaders were urged to embody empathy and ensure that guild members experience spiritual growth.

Father Chambara urged leaders to draw inspiration from Mary, whose attributes embody Christian leadership.

He emphasized obedience, resilience, joy, holiness, faith, humility, and effective communication as essential virtues.

"Mary's obedience led to life, while Eve's disobedience brought death. As leaders, we should embrace obedience to foster unity and progress," Father Chambara noted.

Leaders were also encouraged to observe key Marian feasts such as Mary Mother of God (January 1), Assumption (August 15), Immaculate Conception (December 8), the Marian Devotion Month (May), and the Month of the Rosary (October).

The third talk focused on distinguishing between sacraments and sacramentals. Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace instituted by Christ, including baptism, eucharist, and marriage. Sacramentals, such as the Bible, crucifix, holy water, and rosary, are sacred signs established by the Church to support prayer life.

Father Chambara urged leaders to promote the rosary and Marian devotions within their families and communities.

The day concluded with a Holy Mass, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and a rosary prayer at the shrine's grotto.

The second day began with Holy Mass, followed by the presentation of appreciation gifts to Father Chambara, Sister Matongo, and the resident sisters.

A member of the Sisters of Jesus of Nazareth shared the inspiring history of Mariachitubu Shrine.

The shrine stands as a testament to the generosity of an elderly couple who bequeathed their estate for its development, now managed by the Sisters of Maria Chiyedza.

Sister Francisca Matongo, the Spiritual Advisor, expressed satisfaction with the recollection but noted her wish for full attendance.

"Three-quarters of the eligible persons attended. It was not a bad number, but I would have been very happy if all people were there.

The talks were very good, and the facilitator was excellent.

The guild did well to have a recollection after their commissioning so that they start their tenure well," said Sr. Matongo.

She also noted, "One other good thing about the recollection was that the environment was very conducive for prayer; you didn't need to remind people to be quiet. It got them in the prayer mood on its own."

Mrs. Osline Makamure, Chairperson of the Hosi



Sr. Francisca, the spiritual advisor of the guild, gives her remarks before the final blessing at Mass.

yeDenga guild in the Archdiocese of Harare, described the recollection as spiritually edifying.

"It was good, and we were really blessed.

What was good about it was that we went to a far and quiet place, 'far from the madding crowd,' as it were. The recollection gave us an opportunity to bond as leaders.

We were reminded of the guild's spirituality and goals.

I was happy with the turnout; only about three people did not turn up.

My major takeaway was that we were told that as leaders, we come across people of diverse backgrounds and different age groups.

We were taught to accommodate them all in their diversity. As leaders, we need to be united," said Mrs. Makamure.

A Prayerful Foundation for Leadership

The recollection marked a significant step in the guild leaders' journey to integrate spiritual depth with their administrative roles.

The weekend served as both a renewal of faith and a preparation for their leadership responsibilities in guiding fellow members in the Marian way.

"It was such a prayerful and transformative weekend. We leave here spiritually renewed and ready to lead our guild in faith and service," reflected one participant.

The Maria Hosi yeDenga guild leaders now look ahead to fostering unity, faith, and devotion within their parishes, drawing strength from Mary as their model of humble and obedient leadership.

Inner-city deanery youths keep the faith alive amid declining church participation

By Francesca Mangwiro



A cross-section of the youth at the Inner-City Deanery Youth Mass.

At a time when youth participation in church activities has seen a noticeable decline, the Inner-City Deanery of the Archdiocese of Harare continues to shine as a beacon of hope. With a well-established tradition of hosting Deanery Youth Masses every two months, the youths remain actively engaged in their faith.

This steadfast commitment is particularly significant as the Catholic Church celebrates the 2025 Jubilee Year, themed "Hope".

Supporting such initiatives is crucial to ensuring that young people remain rooted in the Church and are nurtured into responsible adults.

On Sunday, February 16, 2025, St. Peter's Canisius Parish hosted the latest Inner-City Deanery Youth Mass, bringing together young Catholics from six parishes in the deanery. The only exception was Our Lady of the Wayside Parish in Mt. Pleasant, whose youths were unable to attend due to a Confirmation ceremony taking place on the same day.

The Mass commenced at 10 AM, led by Fr. Jingison, the Inner-City Deanery spiritual director. Also in attendance were Rev. Zakeyo, a deacon serving at the parish.

The Inner-City Deanery Youth Choir led the congregation in soul-stirring hymns, creating an uplifting and spiritually enriching atmosphere.

In his homily, Rev. Zakeyo urged the youths to place their trust in the Lord, rather than relying solely on their peers or their own abilities.

His message resonated deeply, serving as a reminder of the importance of faith and reliance on God.

During the Mass, Fr. Jingison took a moment to recognize the Inner-City Deanery youth advisors, offering a special blessing to the newly appointed executive team that will work closely with the young people in guiding their spiritual and social growth.

Following the Mass, attendees had the opportunity to socialize and enjoy a variety of meals and refreshments.

The event also featured several engaging activities designed to foster unity and celebrate talent within the youth community.

A choir competition was among the day's highlights, with the theme song being "Yesu Akati Chiuyai."

The competition showcased the incredible musical talent within the deanery, and the results were as follows:

1st Place: Holy Name Parish Choir

2nd Place: St. Peter Canisius' Choir

3rd Place: Sacred Heart Cathedral Choir

Another exciting segment was the modeling competition, where participants displayed confidence and creativity.



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The event concluded with the crowning of Mr. and Mrs. Inner-City, a moment of celebration and camaraderie.

Speaking to SOCCOM, one of the youth participants emphasised the importance of these Deanery Youth Masses, noting that they provide a platform for young Catholics to connect, network, and grow spiritually.

These bi-monthly gatherings are not just about worship; they are holistic experiences that incorporate education, spirituality, and entertainment.

Past events have included:

- Mock Rooru Day, which helped youths appreciate traditional values and cultural heritage.
- Sports and recreational activities promoting teamwork and physical well-being.
- Talks on various topics, addressing issues relevant to young people today.
- Combined pilgrimages to sacred sites such as Mutemwa, deepening their spiritual journey.
- Charity and fundraising initiatives, such as a Valentine's Dinner aimed at raising funds to support fellow youths struggling with tuition fees.

As the day's events wrapped up at 4 PM, with the guidance of advisors from various parishes, participants departed with a renewed sense of faith and fellowship.

With the Jubilee Year 2025 approaching, efforts like these serve as a testament to the resilience and dedication of young Catholics in the Archdiocese of Harare.

By fostering such initiatives, the Church can ensure that the youth remain active, engaged, and spiritually nurtured for generations to come.



The youth and their advisors actively participate at Mass



Adjudicators judge the performing choirs



St. Peter Canisius' choir performs



Fr. Jingisoni fails to hide his joy



SECAM seminar for new African bishops strengthened responsibility and communion

By Charles Ayetan

"Knowing and Owing SECAM" was the theme of a seminar for new African Catholic bishops ordained across the continent and its islands over the past three years, from 2022 to 2024. Organised from 13th to 17th February by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in Accra, Ghana, this seminar aimed "to reflect on their collective responsibility as bishops" and "to strengthen the bonds of communion."

The first seminar of SECAM for new African Catholic bishops was officially opened on Friday, 14th February 2025, in the capital of Ghana.

About fifty African bishops participated in this important meeting, including forty-two newly ordained bishops from the continent and its islands.

In his opening speech, His Eminence Fridolin Cardinal Ambongo Besungu, Archbishop of Kinshasa and President of SECAM, urged all the bishops of the continent to embrace their "collective responsibility as bishops."

"This gathering," he said, "was an opportunity

for us to reflect on our collective responsibility as bishops, not only in leading our dioceses but also in strengthening the bonds of communion across the entire African continent through SECAM."

As the new bishops embarked on their "journey of leadership in the Church," the Congolese cardinal encouraged them to consider themselves part of something bigger than their dioceses, to engage actively in SECAM's initiatives, and to take their rightful place in shaping its future.

"Be the voice of the voiceless in your communities, promoting justice, peace, and reconciliation," Cardinal Ambongo stressed, urging them to "live out the spirit of synodality, walking together with priests, religious, and laity."

He condemned the cycle of violence, terrorism, insecurity, and political instability in many countries across the continent, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Sudan, Cameroon, and Mozambique.



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Following the opening session, several presentations were made on various topics, including:

- "Knowledge and Ownership of SECAM by African Bishops" by Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo;
- "The Church in Africa Today: Achievements, Challenges, and Vision" by Rev. Francis Appiah-Kubi, a priest and theologian from Ghana;
- "Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM): Its History, Mission, and Utility" by Most Rev. Charles Gabriel Palmer-Buckle, Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana;
- "How to Implant the Synodal Church in Africa from the Experience of Small Christian Communities" by Most Rev. Lucio Andrice Muandula, Bishop of Xai-Xai and First Vice-President of SECAM.

Founded in 1969, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) aimed to promote the mission of evangelisation for the salvation of humanity while building the Church as a Family of God in Africa. It also sought to preserve and foster communion, collaboration, and joint action among the Catholic Episcopal Conferences of Africa and the Islands.

To better understand the structure and functioning of SECAM, key members of the Standing Committee and staff presented the organization and its activities.

The organogram and administration were introduced by Fr. Rafael Simbine, Secretary General of SECAM, followed by presentations from various departments:

- Evangelization Commission by Fr. Alfred Bebody, First Deputy Secretary General of SECAM;
- Justice, Peace, and Development Commission by Most Rev. Stephen Dami Mamza, Bishop of Yola Diocese and Second Vice-President of SECAM;
- Finance Department by Most Rev. Gabriel Kumorodji, Bishop of Keta-Akatsi Diocese, Ghana, and Treasurer of SECAM, alongside Mrs. Mavis Bonsu, Head of Administration and Finance at SECAM Secretariat;
- Communication Department by Mr. Charles



Bishops keenly follow proceedings at Mass

Ayetan, Director of Communication at SECAM Secretariat.

During working group sessions, the newly appointed bishops of Africa engaged in deep reflection on several key questions: How should the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) function to better serve the Church in Africa today? What kind of SECAM do they envision? How can regional bishops' conferences contribute to strengthening SECAM's overall effectiveness and impact? Additionally, how can the synodal Church take root in Africa through the experience of Small Christian Communities?

One of the key discussion points was the need to improve the efficiency of SECAM's regional structures. In response, one working group proposed the following measures:

Regular Reporting: SECAM should require regional structures to submit periodic reports to ensure accountability and progress tracking.

Improved Communication: Strengthening communication channels between SECAM and regional structures to foster better coordination.

Continuous Formation: Organising periodic training sessions, similar to the ongoing seminar, to enhance leadership and administrative capacities.

Economic Self-Sufficiency: Establishing think tanks focused on financial sustainability through investments in real estate and the development of available land resources. These suggestions were recognised as valuable contributions toward reinforcing SECAM's mission and the Catholic Church's evangelization efforts across Africa.

Another crucial question explored was how regional Episcopal Conferences could contribute to enhancing SECAM's effectiveness and overall impact. One working group proposed the following recommendations:

Fostering Communion and Unity: Ensuring that all regional Episcopal Conferences work collaboratively in a spirit of fraternity.

Honouring Financial Contributions: Episcopal Conferences must fulfil their financial commitments at the continental level to sustain SECAM's initiatives.

Good Governance and Transparency: Upholding ethical management of material resources through good governance, accountability, and financial transparency, all in the spirit of synodality.

The seminar concluded with a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by His Eminence Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo at Christ the King Parish, Cantonment, in Accra, Ghana, on Sunday, 16th February 2025, at 10:30 AM. The Mass was concelebrated by participating bishops and numerous priests, marking the conclusion of an insightful and transformative gathering for the Church in Africa.

During his homily at this Holy Mass, Most Rev. Gabriel Kumordji, Bishop of Keta-Akatsi Diocese, Ghana, and Treasurer of SECAM, urged the faithful to work for hope. Commenting on the Gospel of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, which featured Jesus' Beatitudes (Luke 6:17, 20-26), Bishop Kumordji denounced selfish interests and extreme materialism in today's society, which he said were at the root of many atrocities across the world. He then urged everyone, especially the baptized, to sow the seeds of peace in their hearts.



Cardinal Ambongo, SECAM President, follows proceedings at the meeting



Part of the bishop delegates pay attention at Mass





SECAM President meets Malawi bishops

By Stella Zulu

SECAM president with the Malawian Bishops' Conference

President of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) His Eminence Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu says the Catholic Church in Africa requires a new approach to leadership and engagement, extending beyond local boundaries to address broader social issues affecting the continent.

He made the remarks in an interview at the end of his visit to Malawi where he, among other things, interacted with the bishops on the sidelines of their first annual plenary meeting held from January 27-31, 2025 at the Catholic Secretariat in the Capital Lilongwe.

Cardinal Ambongo who is also the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, highlighted the interconnections between Spiritual guidance and social responsibilities, noting that bishops must engage with political leaders to address the challenges faced by populations in Africa.

"The way we have to build the Catholic Church in Africa is new for me.

If we are here in Malawi, the Bishop of Malawi

has to take care not only of the Church in Malawi, but of the Church in Africa. We have this core responsibility for the Church," he stated. On the other hand, the Congolese Prelate who is also a member of the Council of Cardinals, also known as the C9 which is a group of cardinals who advise Pope Francis, highlighted how the Holy Father sees the Church in Africa, recognizing the significant growth it is experiencing, with Catholics making up a notable percentage of the population.

"The Church is growing in Africa. Now we can speak of about 18% of the African population being Catholic, which is a great mark.

So even the ecclesiastic studies, ... confirm that in the globe of our Church, it is in Africa that the Catholic Church is growing more. The future of the Church is in Africa," he concluded.

President of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, His Grace the Most Reverend George Desmond Tambala, said the Cardinal's visit from January 28-30, 2025 will inspire the collaboration in missionary work while tackling



Bishops of Malawi with their Secretary General

both spiritual and social challenges, following the recent synod on Synodality.

"One of the things he has encouraged us to do is

to explore the possibility of even visiting each other within Africa.

It's something that we have not done up to now, so that has been more in the scope," said Archbishop Tambala.

"We have explored the different levels of collaboration in SECAM," he added, there are different levels of collaboration, whether it is in the area of evangelization, area of planting the different missionary works in the region, area of formation of priests, area of social work of the Church, he added."

Cardinal Ambongo also applauded the good work the Church in Malawi is doing in meeting the social and spiritual needs of the people both Catholics and non-Catholics by, among other things, providing education and health services.



Sodality of Our Lady embarks on missionary pilgrimage to Ekuhlengweni

By Soccom Reporter



Members of the Sodality pay close attention at Mass

Inspired by the synodal call to leave no one behind, especially those on the peripheries, the Sodality of Our Lady undertook a missionary pilgrimage to St Timothy Mission in Lupane, under St Luke's Deanery in the Archdiocese of Bulawayo.

Also known as Ekuhlengweni—a place of salvation or redemption—the mission became the destination for 580 Marian pilgrims who devoted their time and resources to this spiritual journey, aligning with the Jubilee Year's theme of hope.

The pilgrimage took place on Sunday, 23 February 2025, and was both a pastoral and spiritual exercise, allowing the faithful to experience the loving mercy of God and receive the Jubilee Indulgence.

Upon arrival, the pilgrims were warmly received by Parish Priest Rev Fr Marko Mkandla and Parish Council Chairperson Mr P. Dube.

They described the visit as evangelisation in action, noting that such a significant presence would inspire locals who had previously been disengaged from church activities to begin attending services.

In her opening remarks, the Archdiocesan Chairlady of the Sodality of Our Lady de-

clared, "We brought love! We came to give you hope, and we came to receive hope from you. In other words, we came to share hope."

The Eucharistic celebration was deeply moving, with the youthful St Timothy Choir leading the liturgy with passion and devotion.

The Spiritual Director of the Sodality of Our Lady, reflecting on the choir's performance, remarked, "I was touched. Their singing was natural, heartfelt, and deeply rooted in faith."

In his homily, the main celebrant, Rev Fr Thabo Dube, emphasised the unwavering love of Mother Mary and her mission to bring people closer to Christ.

"She walks with us, especially in times of trial, keeping our faith strong even amidst hardships. She is our source of hope," he said.

He encouraged the pilgrims to resist the temptation of revenge, to stand firm in their faith, and to be a positive influence in their communities.

An elderly woman, overwhelmed with emotion, approached one of the organisers and said, "Thank you for coming."

"We sometimes feel forgotten, but today, Our Mother Mary has visited us. This is a moment we will never forget."

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Following the Mass, the pilgrims gathered for a brief break, praying the Rosary and sharing lunch before attending two enriching presentations.

In his address, Fr Mkandla spoke passionately about the Blessed Virgin Mary's profound role in his spiritual life.

"To truly understand Christ, one must first understand Mary. If you are a child of Mary, then, like Mary, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit," he said, urging the faithful to entrust their hopes to the Blessed Mother.

Fr Thabo Dube, in his presentation on Mary, Mother of Hope, emphasised the power of silence, stating that dignity and strength often come from restraint.

"What the world needs now, more than ever, is hope. A person without hope is as good as dead. Mary looked up to God for inspiration, not down for desperation—learn from her example," he said.

The pilgrimage was a profound reminder of the call to mission and service, reinforcing the importance of spreading Marian devotion to even the most remote parts of the archdiocese.

In a final act of generosity, Fr Mkandla announced that the grocery donations brought by the pilgrims would be shared among all parishes and religious communities in St Luke's Deanery, ensuring that the spirit of the pilgrimage extended far beyond the day's events.



Members of Sodality pose for a photo



Members of Sodality pilgrims participate at Mass

Strengthening families in a troubled world

By Soccom Reporter

The family, once regarded as the cornerstone of society, is facing unprecedented challenges in today's world.

A host of external and internal forces threaten its stability, undermining its role as a nurturing ground for love, values, and faith.

The rise of LGBTQ ideologies, the gender identity crisis, and an erosion of traditional family structures pose fundamental questions about the future of this sacred institution.

Beyond ideological shifts, modern threats such as social media and technology have led to a decline in face-to-face interactions, weakening family bonds.

Economic hardships, including unemployment and poverty, place immense strain on relationships, reducing the time and energy couples can invest in family life.

Additionally, many Zimbabweans are forced to seek opportunities abroad, leaving families separated for extended periods—sometimes with one parent abroad, or in some cases, both parents away while children are left behind,



disrupting the natural support and guidance a family provides.

The decline in moral standards and the rise of secularism further contribute to the weakening of family values, exposing children to distorted narratives that can shape their worldviews in damaging ways.

Negative media influences and increasing materialism often prioritize self-gratification over self-sacrifice, leading to fragile relationships that cannot withstand life's inevitable trials.

Social decay, marked by rising crime rates and moral indifference, has only deepened family disintegration.

Studies have shown that a significant percentage of prisoners come from single-parent households, highlighting the far-reaching consequences of

broken families.

Amidst these challenges, the Church continues to champion the sanctity and stability of family life. One such effort was evident on Saturday, 15 February 2025, when St Canisius Parish, in the Archdiocese of Harare, celebrated the launch of the St Canisius Catholic Couples Association at the Cosmopolitan Restaurant in Harare.

This initiative aims to strengthen marriages and family life by fostering love, unity, and a deeper commitment to Christian values.

The event, held from 11 am to 1:30 pm, was attended by 43 couples, eager to embark on a journey of renewal and growth in their marriages.

The success of the launch was a testament to the dedication of the Steering Com-

mittee, who worked alongside Fr Murwira and Fr Mapfumo to bring the vision to life.

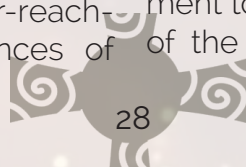
Esteemed guests, including Parish Priest Fr Mapfumo, Reverend Zacheo, and Sister Anuarite, the National Coordinator for the Family Apostolate at the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), graced the occasion.

Mr and Mrs Chabaya, a guest couple, led interactive sessions that highlighted the importance of communication in relationships, with the key takeaway being: "#We Listen, We Don't Judge."

In her heartfelt address, Sister Anuarite urged couples to cultivate love, harmony, and prayer in their homes.

She underscored the family's role as a beacon of evangelization in both the Church and society, a crucial element in safeguarding families against the moral and spiritual crises of the modern world.

The event was filled with joyous moments, including a couples' dance, photo sessions, lunch, and a celebratory group picture.





Sr Anuarite shares a meal with Fr Mapfumo and Rev Zakeyo

A special birthday celebration, complete with a cake-cutting ceremony, added to the festive atmosphere.

As the day drew to a close, Fr Mapfumo blessed the couples, encouraging them to nurture their love and faith amidst the many challenges of modern family life.

The launch of the St Canisius Catholic Couples Association is more than just an initiative—it is a beacon of hope, proving that with faith, commitment, and a supportive community, families can withstand the storms of the modern world and thrive in love and unity.

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The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2025

Let us journey together in hope

Dear brothers and sisters,

We begin our annual pilgrimage of Lent in faith and hope with the penitential rite of the imposition of ashes. The Church, our mother and teacher, invites us to open our hearts to God's grace, so that we can celebrate with great joy the paschal victory of Christ the Lord over sin and death, which led Saint Paul to exclaim: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (*1 Cor 15:54-55*). Indeed, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the heart of our faith and the pledge of our hope in the Father's great promise, already fulfilled in his beloved Son: life eternal (cf. *Jn 10:28; 17:3*). [\[1\]](#)

This Lent, as we share in the grace of the Jubilee Year, I would like to propose a few reflections on what it means to *journey together in hope*, and on the summons to conversion that God in his mercy addresses to all of us, as individuals and as a community.

First of all, *to journey*. The Jubilee motto, "Pilgrims of Hope", evokes the lengthy journey of the people of Israel to the Promised Land, as recounted in the Book of Exodus. This arduous path from slavery to freedom was willed and guided by the Lord, who loves his people and remains ever faithful to them. It is hard to think of the biblical exodus without also thinking of those of our brothers and sisters who in our own day are fleeing situations of misery and violence in search of a better life for themselves and their loved ones. A first call to conversion thus comes from the realization that all of us are pilgrims in this life; each of us is invited to stop and ask how our lives reflect this fact. Am I really on a journey, or am I standing still, not moving, either immobilized by fear and hopelessness or reluctant to move out of my comfort zone? Am I seeking ways to leave behind the occasions of sin and situations that degrade my dignity? It would be a good Lenten exercise for us to compare our daily life with that of some migrant or foreigner, to learn how to sympathize with their experiences and in this way discover what God is asking of us so that we can better advance on our journey to the house of the Father. This would be a good "examination

of conscience” for all of us wayfarers.

Second, to journey *together*. The Church is called to walk together, to be synodal. [2] Christians are called to walk at the side of others, and never as lone travellers. The Holy Spirit impels us not to remain self-absorbed, but to leave ourselves behind and keep walking towards God and our brothers and sisters. [3] Journeying together means consolidating the unity grounded in our common dignity as children of God (cf. *Gal* 3:26-28). It means walking side-by-side, without shoving or stepping on others, without envy or hypocrisy, without letting anyone be left behind or excluded. Let us all walk in the same direction, tending towards the same goal, attentive to one another in love and patience.

This Lent, God is asking us to examine whether in our lives, in our families, in the places where we work and spend our time, we are capable of walking together with others, listening to them, resisting the temptation to become self-absorbed and to think only of our own needs. Let us ask ourselves in the presence of the Lord whether, as bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity in the service of the Kingdom of God, we cooperate with others. Whether we show ourselves welcoming, with concrete gestures, to those both near and far. Whether we make others feel a part of the community or keep them at a distance. [4] This, then, is a second call to conversion: a summons to synodality.

Third, let us journey together *in hope*, for we have been given a promise. May *the hope that does not disappoint* (cf. *Rom* 5:5), the central message of the Jubilee, [5] be the focus of our Lenten journey towards the victory of Easter. As Pope Benedict XVI taught us in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, “the human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: ‘neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (*Rom* 8:38-39)”. [6] Christ, my hope, has risen! [7] He lives and reigns in glory. Death has been transformed into triumph, and the faith and great hope of Christians rests in this: the resurrection of Christ!

This, then, is the third call to conversion: a call to hope, to trust in God and his great promise of eternal life. Let us ask ourselves: Am I convinced that the Lord forgives my sins? Or do I act as if I can save myself? Do I long for salvation and call upon God’s help to attain it? Do I concretely experience the hope that enables me to interpret the events of history and inspires in me a commitment to justice and fraternity, to care for our common home and in such a way that no one feels excluded?

Sisters and brothers, thanks to God’s love in Jesus Christ, we are sustained in the hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5:5). Hope is the “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”. [8] It moves the Church to pray for “everyone to be saved” (*1 Tim* 2:4) and to look forward to her being united with Christ, her bridegroom, in the glory of heaven. This was the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila: “Hope,

O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one” (*The Exclamations of the Soul to God*, 15:3). [9]

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope, intercede for us and accompany us on our Lenten journey.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 6 February 2025

Memorial of St Paul Miki and Companions, martyrs.

FRANCIS





Binga deanery in Hwange diocese leads in showing works of the Jubilee Year

By Quegas Mutale

A cross-section of participants during the jubilee lessons in Binga

As Pope Francis launched the Jubilee Year on 24 December 2024, each diocese has taken up the role of teaching the faithful about its significance in preparation for its conclusion on 6 January 2026.

Hwange Diocese has embraced this call with the theme: 'A Jubilee Renewal in Christ: The Synodal Triumph of Faith, Hope, and Charity.' In line with this, Fr Joshua Del Barrio facilitated a workshop at Tusimpe Pastoral Centre in Binga from 11 to 12 February 2025, where he explained the meaning of the Jubilee Year and emphasised what Catholics should do to honour this sacred period.

The Church in Hwange has encouraged the faithful to make Jubilee Year resolutions at individual, family, association, guild, Small Christian Community, and parish or mission levels.

The workshop in Binga sought to enlighten participants on key aspects of the Jubilee Year.

Fr Del Barrio recounted that the first Jubilee was celebrated in the year 1300, initiated by the then Pope as a Year of Grace, during which prisoners were granted freedom.

Today, a Jubilee occurs every 25 years, fo-

cus on Jesus' mercy.

He reminded participants that the blessings of the Jubilee Year include indulgences, reconciliation, and the experience of divine grace.

Fr Del Barrio also guided attendees on how to prepare for and receive the Sacrament of Confession.

In group discussions, participants shared how they planned to implement Jubilee Year commitments within their missions, associations, guilds, and Small Christian Communities.

"Each Christian is called to share in the task of the Church," said Fr Joshua.

He also spoke on the Synod on Synodality, stressing the importance of finding ways to serve the Church during the Jubilee Year.

During the Catholic Young Adults Association recollection at Tusimpe Pastoral Centre in Binga on 22 February 2025, Fr Del Barrio once again taught on the significance of the Jubilee.

The young adults participated in Eucharistic Adoration and made their confessions as part of their spiritual renewal.



As expected during the Jubilee Year, Fr Del Barrio underscored the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, reminding the young adults that the Jubilee is an encounter with Jesus.

The priest challenged the youth to commit themselves to prayer, reading the Bible, regular confession, Eucharistic Adoration, praying the Holy Rosary, offering prayers for Pope Francis' intentions, attending Mass regularly, and performing works of mercy.

In his Sunday homilies, Fr Del Barrio frequently encourages the faithful to visit the sick and those who are suffering in various ways.

"As we look at His cross, we see hope in our suffering.

"We suffer in different ways; it could be through illness or poverty.

"Some people have lost jobs because of what is happening in America," Fr Del Barrio emphasised.

He urged the faithful to be instruments of love, hope, and reconciliation, encouraging them to demonstrate acts of kindness towards prisoners, pray for them, and share food with those in need.

Putting these lessons into practice, parishioners of All Souls Parish visited Binga District Hospital on 16 February 2025 to pray for the sick and offer them words of encouragement. They also visited expectant mothers at the Chipangawodi Waiting Mothers' Shelter at Binga District Hospital, sharing messages of hope and support.

Mr Palicha Munkombwe, a member of St Joseph's Guild at All Souls Parish in Hwange Diocese, encouraged the sick and their caregivers not to lose heart but to believe and find hope in Jesus Christ.

Offering words of encouragement to the expectant mothers, Tito Muleya, Chairperson of the Catholic Young Adults Association in Binga Deanery, shared:

"The children you are bearing are God's work. He has a plan for them—He knows when and how to fulfil it. Life is a gift from God. He gives the blessing of a child, and in that child, He grants life. We are merely vessels chosen to

bear and nurture these children. May you put your faith in God. The same God who has given you this precious gift will sustain its life."

Through such activities, Binga Deanery continues to demonstrate the true essence of the Jubilee Year—renewal in Christ through acts of faith, hope, and charity.



Fr. Del Barrio delivers a lesson on jubilee



Waiting mothers at Chipangawodi shelter



Binga District Hospital staff receive goodies



Young faith communicators' Vatican visit during the Jubilee Year brews lasting memories

By Quegas Mutale

Young faith communicators from different countries around the world had a remarkable experience in the Vatican during their residential week from 27 January to 1 February 2025.

The fourth cohort of Faith Communicators (FC4) was privileged to attend the Jubilee of the World of Communication in Rome, a rare event that occurs once every 25 years.

During the first three days of the encounter, participants engaged in storytelling, interactive activities, and keynote addresses, all designed to explore the intersection of faith and communication in the digital age.

Faith communicators, religious leaders, and bishops responsible for communication took part in a private audience with Pope Francis in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Pal-

ace in the Vatican on 27 January 2025.

The 15 young faith communicators had the extraordinary opportunity to shake hands with the Pope, engage in one-on-one conversations with him, and receive his blessings.

During a reflection session, FC4 participants shared how meeting the Pope was a historic experience that would leave them with lasting memories.

On 28 January 2025, the FC4 participants visited Vatican media offices, where they met various professionals and gained a broader understanding of media beyond their diocesan experiences.

Fr Paul Samasumo urged young communicators, particularly those from Africa, to share their stories for publication in Vatican News.



Young Faith Communicators engage in a group

He acknowledged the challenges Vatican News faces in amplifying African voices. "In this year of jubilee, if you have stories of success and unsung heroes doing great things we do not know about, this is the platform you have," he encouraged.

The faith communicators also met representatives from Doctors with Africa CUA-MM, a non-governmental organisation focused on healthcare.

The engagement included deep conversations enriched by a question-and-answer session, allowing participants to understand the organisation's programmes.

A visit to St Peter's Basilica and the Necropolis, where St Peter's relics lie, provided a spiritual encounter and a historic moment of learning about the Catholic Church's heritage and tradition.

On 29 January 2025, a visit to the Vatican Apostolic Library gave the young communicators an opportunity to learn how scholars can freely access Church documents.

Another highlight of the day was a visit to St Mary Major Basilica, dedicated to the Mother of Christ the Saviour and home to the first nativity scene.

It is a favourite site for Pope Francis, who has expressed his wish to be buried there.

At the Vatican Radio Museum, the FC4 group was taken through the history of radio and its evolution.

The museum houses instruments such as

radios, microphones, recorders, and receivers, along with photographs dating back to 1931 when Vatican Radio was founded.

These exhibits track the advancements in radio technology over time.

On 30 January 2025, the young faith communicators visited St Paul's Basilica Outside the Walls, where they learned about its history and prayed before the relics of St Paul. The Basilica's interior walls are adorned with mosaics depicting all the Popes of the Catholic Church, including Pope Francis.

Participants also visited the Holy See Press Office, where they engaged in discussions on how the office operates, particularly in issuing press statements from the Vatican.

The Vatican Museums experience was awe-inspiring, with participants appreciating the art that visually narrates biblical stories from the Old and New Testaments.

A particularly memorable moment was the visit to the Sistine Chapel, where they marvelled at Michelangelo's renowned frescoes depicting biblical events.

The chapel also serves as the venue where cardinals elect a new Pope.

On 31 January 2025, the young faith communicators engaged in discussions with Dr Paolo Ruffini, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication.

The session deepened their understanding of how the dicastery functions. Dr Ruffini encouraged young people to embrace faith.

communication, regardless of their starting point.

The formation meeting allowed participants to pray and reflect on their experiences.

Many faith communicators shared stories of how the jubilee and their residential week in Rome had transformed them, with emotions running high as they recounted their spiritual journeys.

During the final online meeting on 24 February 2025, Nataša Govekar, the Theological Pastoral Director, expressed her gratitude to the young faith communicators who participated in the programme and to the dicastery team, giving special mention to Silvia Grechi, the Project Manager. Govekar reminded the young people,

"You are becoming stewards in your communities at the service of this communication."

She also hinted that the Dicastery for Communication was preparing to launch the call for this year's faith communicators' programme, which would mark the final cohort in the first

five-year cycle.

She reassured them, "The little part of our lives continues to be with each other."

Encouraging participants to remain connected in the digital space, Govekar urged the FC4 communicators to share stories from their dioceses to contribute to the monthly newsletter published by the dicastery.

The Dicastery for Communication runs a five-year programme on faith communication in the digital world, targeting young people aged 35 years and below.

The programme began in 2021 with the first cohort and continued through to 2024 with the fourth cohort.

Each year, the dicastery recruits 16 young faith communicators from different parts of the world.

The FC4 group attended the Jubilee of the World of Communications in Rome from 24 to 26 January 2025. After the jubilee celebrations, the young faith communicators visited various significant sites during their residential week





Lenten Pastoral Letter

3 March 2025

“...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:19)

1. At the synagogue in Nazareth our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and new sight to the blind: to free the oppressed and to announce the Lord’s year of favour.” (Luke 4: 18-19). Scripture scholars are agreed that the Year of the Lord’s favour referred to the jubilee. That our Lord identified his person, life, and ministry with the Jubilee year, call us to a deeper reflection. This year we have even more reasons to do so, for our Lenten season will be lived in the context of the Jubilee Year 2025, whose theme is “Pilgrims of Hope.”

2. In our Lenten reflections this year we propose that we revisit the jubilee spirituality and see how it can enrich the Lenten spirituality. In the Church, ordinary jubilees are celebrated every twenty-five years. The noble idea of celebrating jubilees has its roots in Judaism and in our blessed Lord’s understanding of the ‘Year of the Lord’s favour.’

3. In Judaism jubilees were celebrated every fifty years. We read in Leviticus 25: 8ff that there was a rich spirituality that accompanied the celebration of a jubilee. The institution of which spoke to the Israelite nation of its self-understanding, the place of God in the lives of the people and the place of all created things. On the fiftieth year, that is the jubilee year, certain actions were to be taken. Property that had been leased, bought, or taken because its owner failed to pay a debt, was returned to its rightful owner. Slaves who were in bondage were released and once again they experienced freedom. Debts were forgiven, the land was left fallow and the whole year was rendered a time for celebration. The impacts were reparation, reconciliation, restoration, and rest.

4. There is a sense in which Jesus’ presence, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection can be understood as the realisation of the jubilee year. Indeed, as our Blessed Lord proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth his ministry ushered in a time for celebration whereby the poor heard the Good News; captives were set free, the blind regained their sight, and the oppressed were liberated. Joy was palpable and an experienced reality. Once again, a people that had become accustomed “to a distant and absent God,” experienced God’s presence through the loving compassionate ministry of Jesus.

5. As an institution the jubilee was key to the lives of the people. It had social, religious, economic, and political benefits. It prevented greed, for there was a limit to what one could own. It dealt away with generational slavery enabling indentured people to return home. It provided economic guidelines and ensured stability. We are told the sale of the land and slaves was determined by the closeness of the jubilee. The jubilee guaranteed harmony and peace and fostered hope. Theologically, the jubilee represented God’s mercy and providence. It proclaimed God’s sovereignty, for it underlined the fact

that the land belongs to God, and people are stewards of God's land. The celebration of the Jubilee, highlighted God's place as the provider of people's needs and therefore called people to trust in him. What was important was that the liberty it proclaimed was for all the inhabitants of the land.

6. Key to the celebration of any jubilee is the restoration of the people's dignity, correcting the wrongs of the society and an opportunity to re-orientate ourselves. In this the jubilee spirituality is not divorced from Lenten spirituality. For what is Lent if it is not about renewal of our baptismal commitment, restoration, being right with God, one another, and creation? The Holy Father Pope Francis in his Lenten message in 2024 urged us, "to be in touch with our reality." We are likely to benefit from the Lenten and Jubilee celebrations this year if we are cognisant of the environment in which we are called to pray, fast, and give alms, that is, to live our Lent.

7. It is a time to have our identity restored by a break with sin and experience a reset of freedom by God's forgiveness. This choice affects us as individuals, as a community and as a nation.

8. As a Church we welcome and congratulate the nation for the abolition of the Death Penalty Act. That was a step in the right direction indicating we care about human life and dignity. We uphold the sovereignty of God, and we will never usurp God's power to decree the span of one's life.

9. There are many areas where we can benefit from a reset and where restoration is needed and where a jubilee experience is needed. Our nation, like most developing countries, is burdened under the yoke of the sovereign debt. Sadly, international monetary institutions have crafted their policies such that the interest on lending rates for developing countries are so high. This keeps developing nations in bondage, fans poverty and holds them in perpetual slavery. We call for a reform of these unjust practices as they speak against development and the hopes of many nations. Developing nations deserve reprieve. Echoing Pope John Paul II's plea, we "appeal to all those involved, especially the most powerful nations, not to let this opportunity of the Jubilee Year pass, without taking a decisive step towards definitively resolving the debt crisis." (Message of the Holy Father to the Group "Jubilee 2000 Debt Campaign" 23 September 1999).

10. We are all worried about the situation in the country. Politically, instead of focusing on bread-and-butter issues we are caught up in distractions such as the 'Third term' conversations. Something that has brought with it divisions and unnecessary diversions from the things that do matter. Economically, we are not faring well. Businesses are closing and many people are losing their jobs. The few who are still lucky to be working are burdened under the regime of taxes. Corruption is rampant and seems to be out of control. At the rate which it is taking place, cutting through various sectors, the nation is doomed. One wonders why the corrupt seem uncensured and even rewarded whilst haemorrhaging the nation.

11. It must be said that in our society there is an ever-widening gap between the poor and the rich. Few individuals seem to be benefiting from the wealth of the nation. We would like to remind our people that, "Poverty in the world today is not simply a misfortune, bad luck or inevitable – the result of laziness or ignorance or a lack of development. Poverty in the world today is the direct result of political and economic policies of governments, political parties, and big business." (Albert Nolan, Hope in an Age of Despair, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 2009, 39). That poverty is not accidental, but a result of particular choices and systems, calls for our introspection as a nation.

12. In the spirit of the Jubilee Year and Lent we call for a *metanoia*. A term that is often translated as repentance or conversion, but one that is broader than that, for it means a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of one's ways and one's behaviour. In the scriptures, God's demand for change is always a demand for justice (cf. Isaiah 1: 16-17. The *metanoia* that can benefit us as a nation is one that begins with and goes beyond individual change to societal change that brings true freedom and shared national progress.

13. St John Paul II used to speak of the social structures of sin, referring to institutions that perpetuate human suffering and injustice. We would like to propose during this Jubilee year and Lent that we evaluate our institutions *vis-à-vis* their contributions to the 'cultures that promote the common good.'

14. As we celebrate the Jubilee Year and this year's Lenten season we pray that we may indeed be pilgrims of hope. May the living out of our jubilee spirituality be an active pilgrimage leading us to a time of renewal, restoration and indeed a time of hope for all who long for the year of the Lord's favour.

Wishing you a blessed Lenten season lived in the spirit of the Jubilee Year 2025.

Prayer:

**Lord, may this Lenten season, in the grace of the Jubilee Year,
renew our hearts, strengthen our faith, fill us with hope,
and lead us ever deeper into your mercy and joy.**

Amen.

+Rt. Rev. Paul Horan, O. Carm., Bishop of Mutare Diocese, ZCBC President.

+Mt. Rev. R.C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare Archdiocese, ZCBC Vice President.

+Rt. Rev. Raphael M.M. Ncube, Bishop of Hwange Diocese, ZCBC Secretary and Treasurer.

+Mt. Rev. Alex Thomas S.V.D., Archbishop of Bulawayo Archdiocese.

+Rt. Rev. Rudolf Nyandoro, Bishop of Gweru.

+Rt. Rev. Raymond Mupandasekwa, C.Ss.R., Bishop of Masvingo Diocese and Administrator of Chinhoyi Diocese.

+Rt. Rev. Eusebius J. Nyathi, Bishop of Gokwe Diocese.



POETRY CORNER

WHEN ADULTHOOD CAME

My childhood was pure, so bright, so free,
Like a nun, I lived in sanctity.
For Christ alone, my heart would burn,
And souls for Him, I sought to turn.

My Bible lay close, my faith stood tall,
Never missing the temple's call.
In church, I found my steady place,
Guarding my soul with holy grace.

A rosary hung within my hand,
Prayer was law, a firm command.
I walked with Christ, my love was true,
In sacred light, my spirit grew.



But then—adulthood darkly came,
With greed for wealth and thirst for fame.
My love for truth began to wane,
Like artless frames—void and plain.

Desires rose; my soul grew weak,
Yet faith within refused to break.
I drank, I sinned, I played with fire,
Still whispering prayers to the Higher.

Now a sinner, lost and torn,
Trapped beyond the river's shore.
When will I find my soul again?
When will God call me home as friend?

— By Lorna Chosani

Us

How do I get to converse with you?
On bended knees, we whisper in sacred
hush.
Upon the kneeler, I spill my soul like wa-
ter,
and there, you listen—though you have
always heard.
There, I unveil myself—though you have
always known.
There, you descend, and in the hush of
grace,
you let me glimpse the vastness of you.

How do I get to be your companion?
I bow my head, undone by your splen-
dour.
I strike my breast, a mourner of my own
frailty.
Yet here, we reconcile and embrace,
letting bygones be bygones.
Here, you draw me near, though you are
infinite,
and I, so small, hold fast to you.
Here, we pledge our company to one
another

How do I get to travel with you always?

I come, remorseful, after straying far,
laying my failures bare before your gaze.
Here, my sorrow speaks louder than my
lips,
and your mercy rushes in like a flood.
You see, as you have always seen,
that I am lost without you.

How do I get not to take you for granted?

I name the smallest gifts, each one a
token of your love.
I bring my faintest worries, so light yet
weighty in my hands.
In surrendering the little, I trust you in the
great.
In offering the least, I learn to lean on you
for all.
And in your quiet providence,
you teach me to depend on you once
more.

— By Fr Johnston Mlambo

Intention of the Holy Father

MARCH

Let us Pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences





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