

COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE 18TH BIENNIAL PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF TAMALE
ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE PASTORAL CONFERENCE (TEPPCON) HELD
AT THE CENTRE FOR PASTORAL FORMATION, TAMALE, NORTHERN
REGION, FROM 25TH TO 29TH NOVEMBER, 2019 ON

THE THEME:

*“PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TODAY: THE
NEED FOR A RENEWED MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP AND CATECHETICAL
FORMATION”*

1.0 Greetings:

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:13).

2.0 Preamble:

We, the Bishops, delegates of Arch/dioceses and representatives of commissions of the Tamale Ecclesiastical Pastoral Conference (TEPPCON), having met for our 18th Biennial Plenary Assembly at the Centre for Pastoral Formation, Tamale in the Northern Region, deliberated prayerfully among other things on the theme: *“Prospects and Challenges of the Catholic Church Today: The Need for a Renewed Missionary Discipleship and Catechetical Formation”*.

It is the outcome of our deliberations that we wish to briefly share with you, dear people of God and all you people of good will, for the advancement of our mission to bring God’s saving message to the ends of the earth.

3.0 Prospects and Challenges of the Catholic Church Today:

“They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake.” (Lk 21:12).

The Catholic Church experiences globally in our times calculated persecution within and without herself. She is the most attacked, wounded and derided for clerical sexual abuse but also for her position on ethical issues like lesbian-gay-bisexual and trans-gender (LGBT) issues, abortion, euthanasia, cloning, etc. The Church is bleeding in our era when some systems of thought like materialism, secularism, individualism, minimalism, hedonism, etc become globally pervasive as expressions of post-modern western philosophy.

It is not only negative western cultural values that pose a serious challenge to the Church, but also obnoxious African cultural elements. The African worldview is predominated by spirits responsible for fortune and misfortune, making the African

live in constant fear of these spirits. Many African Christians still subscribe to this worldview several years after their baptism. Pentecostal and evangelical churches play on the fears of the people to exploit them. The Catholic Church is challenged to have a properly inculturated Christianity that is at once Christian and African to be able to respond adequately to certain existential questions of the African without having to baptise dehumanising African cultural beliefs and practices.

There is also the challenge of the multiplicity of faith traditions today. Catholics with weak faith easily drift to other churches and religious bodies.

The mass media also poses a serious challenge to the Church. Pentecostalism in particular dominates the use of the media to get their messages across and our vulnerable faithful fall prey to them because of their inability to discern the truth. This situation leaves many a Catholic monumentally confused.

To respond to the myriads of challenges facing the Church today we need to form ourselves individually and collectively to be missionaries on a threefold mission: to the non-baptised who have never heard of the Gospel of Christ, to the already baptised in order to deepen their faith, and finally to the strayed and lapsed Catholics to bring them back into the fold. In this we need an inculturated Christian message, new strategies and new methodologies for effective evangelisation. The work of evangelisation cannot be done and should not be left only to the ordained. All hands must be put on deck. Members of professional bodies like nurses, doctors and teachers would be appreciated if they avail themselves to be trained as voluntary catechists to help in the faith formation especially of the youth. We must use both the approach of fishing new souls for Christ and the approach of preserving and conserving the sheep already in the fold. Adequate and ongoing catechesis must be offered to engender faith and satisfy the spiritual hunger of the youth.

4.0 Pastoral Care for Marriage and Family Life

Marriage and family life is divinely set forth as the ambience in which human life thrives and blossoms. Unfortunately the sacred institution of marriage and family life has come under severe attack today with the potential to render man a wild, homeless being. The beauty of marriage and family life in God's plan of salvation suffers great distortion in an unprecedented manner in our times. In the face of the numerous challenges and hardships facing marriage and family life today all and sundry must respond to the post-synodal document of Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, with faith, hope and love.

We call on couples in particular to invest a lot of time and resources in their marriage and family life. Love must be given a chance to convert the weakness of a family member into strength for happy family living. Celebrating marriage

anniversaries/jubilees, attending couples' retreat, having adequate pre- and postmarital counselling, honest appreciation of one another and sincere admission of guilt and apology are all ingredients that make marriage work well.

The laity also has a role to play to salvage marriage and family life from "the jaws of lions". Third party interferences in marriage especially from some extended family members and friends, and the attitude of condemning marriages in distress, e.g. childless couples, must be banished from the midst of the laity.

The clergy and religious have a huge responsibility in marriage and family life. They have not only the duty of preparing couples properly for happy marriage life, but also the task of accompanying them especially when the marriage is facing challenges. The condemning attitude is to be eschewed, allowing more the mercy of God to come to the fore.

5.0 Promoting the Advocacy Capacity of the Church

The Church is in a good position to play advocacy roles to influence policy makers to make good policies where there is none, to stop bad policies and to offer alternatives. Certain pre-conditions that make advocacy possible include legitimacy, credibility, accountability, and resource power. Mechanisms that promote advocacy are effective structures, evidence of need for policy, civic agency, effective communication, presence or visibility, and network building. The Church has done this creditably and it is hoped that she will continue to play this advocacy role as part of her prophetic mandate to bring relief to people living in distressing conditions.

6.0 Continuous Support for our Seminaries:

The major seminary, the spiritual and intellectual power house of the Church, is experiencing great infrastructural and financial challenges resulting from dwindling foreign donor support. The situation calls for all to wake up and owe the seminary and take up full responsibility for it. Having discussed this situation passionately, we came to the conclusion that a seminary week be instituted in the province to fundraise and mobilise material support for the seminary. The seminary needs not only material support but also aid in the process of forming seminarians. So Catholics in general and the parish/diocesan vocations teams in particular need to take up seriously the challenge to accompany seminarians to become the priests God wants for the Church.

Conclusion:

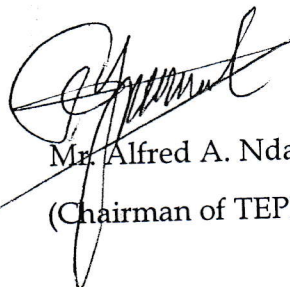
We are most indebted to God for his unfailing support especially in these trying times. It is his word that encourages us to stand erect and hold our heads high in tribulation and persecution. So in the face of the current challenges we shall not lose

focus to stand erect. There is no room to feel crippled and demoralised in any way. Rather we must muster the courage that the grace of God gives us to move ahead. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the help of Christians, continue to intercede for us to weather the storms of our times and to build ourselves into a formidable Church of Christ.

Issued on 29th November 2019 by:



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