



**COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE,
MEETING IN SUNYANI FROM 8TH TO 16TH NOVEMBER 2013 ON THE
THEME: *THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH IN GHANA.***

1. Greetings

Dear Brothers and Sisters of our beloved country Ghana “*we always thank God for you all, mentioning you in our prayers continually*” (1Thess 1:2), remembering how much each one of you means to us and to the nation. We your Chief Shepherds of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference meeting in our Annual Plenary Assembly from 8th to 16th of November in Sunyani, send you warm greetings of peace and love.

2. Expression of Gratitude

We wish to express, first of all, our profound gratitude to the Almighty Father for seeing us through the past year and especially for guiding us safely through the momentous events of the recent past. We commend the people of Ghana for the peaceful conduct of our political elections and the aftermath, and we call on all not to relent in their prayers and in their efforts to maintain and consolidate the peace that we enjoy now.

3. Theme of this Year’s Plenary Assembly

The theme for this year's plenary Assembly of the Conference is: *The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith in Ghana*, a theme inspired by the work of the 13th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops celebrated in Rome in 2012. We believe this theme has a timely relevance not only for Christians but also for all Ghanaians. The Christian faith reached the shores of Ghana over 500 years ago and has since made so many in-roads into our Ghanaian society and life. However, after so many years of evangelization and various efforts to grow and deepen the faith it has become evident that at the turn of the third millennium there is an urgent need for this faith to be re-proposed to the men and women of today with a renewed zeal.

4. The New Evangelization in its Global Context

Evangelization has to do with an encounter with the God of life "*who alone fills our existence with deep meaning and peace*" (Final Message, Synod of Bishops, 2012). It is new, however, in the sense that there is the urgent need more than ever today to revive and rekindle this encounter with God and his Son Jesus Christ especially in the light of the changed social, cultural, economic, civil, religious and political contexts of our time. Some of these contexts are making the encounter with God and the Gospel of his Son more and more difficult, creating confusion regarding the nature and object of this encounter and sometimes resulting in a rejection of the whole idea of God and religion. The call for a new evangelization for the transmission of the

Christian faith is addressed to every Christian and all men and women of goodwill to live their communitarian experience in a renewed way and to allow this to show forth in their life and conduct.

5. The Ghanaian Context

Ghana has in recent years been touted not only as a peaceful and an emerging stable democracy but also as a profoundly religious nation. This is certainly evidenced by the growing Christian population within the country, the proliferation of religious movements by the day and the obvious show of religious piety even in the public *fora* where national days of prayers and thanksgiving, sometimes at the behest of the political leadership, have become the order of the day.

However, in spite of all these positive signs, the Ghanaian context equally stands in urgent need of the New Evangelization. In spite of her flamboyant religious garb, the changing social, cultural, economic and political situation in Ghana is making a deep and personal encounter with Jesus Christ very difficult. Although there are no signs of an outright rejection of Jesus Christ and his message, there are indications of growing indifference towards the message of the Gospel and a lack of personal commitment to Him on the part of those who bear the name Christian. Whereas our Churches are packed on Sundays with faithful worshippers the fruits of this religious fervour are yet to be manifestly visible in our socio-economic and political life.

6. Areas in need of the New Evangelization

The Individual Human heart

Evangelization always begins with the individual human heart. It is fundamentally an act of faith which leads to a change of heart following a personal encounter with the Word of God. It involves a conscious effort by the Christian, aided by the grace of God, to turn away from evil and to embrace a life of righteousness and holiness. It is clear that Evangelization is intricately linked with faith and that a crisis in evangelization can be traced to a crisis of faith. The transmission of the faith is not possible without a deep personal relationship with God. This is a challenge for all of us, bishops, priests, religious men and women and lay faithful.

As Ghanaians, our cultural and traditional values have prepared the way for the encounter with the Gospel of Christ. Love of neighbor, hospitality to the stranger, disdain for theft and the appropriating of things that belong to others or to the community, respect for the elderly and love for moral rectitude are all cherished values of our nation. However, it is sad to note that even after so many years of evangelization and encounter with the light of the Gospel we seem to have even lost these foundational values as a people. What is even more worrying is the fact that those of us who bear the name Christian are failing in our vocation to be “*salt of the earth and light of the world*” (cf. Matt 5:13-14). We call on all Christians and members of other faith

communities, and indeed, all men and women of goodwill to renew their personal relationship with God and let this relationship influence their conduct.

The Family

The family of today stands in grave need of the new evangelization by virtue of the fundamental role it plays in the society and the church. This vital unit of both society and Church is threatened today by models of family life that are incompatible with the design and will of God and needs to be protected by the state and evangelized with values that promote it to play its role in society and the church. As a locus and instrument of evangelization we commend the work of the Christian Family Movements and Apostolates for their witness to family values inspired by the Gospel and we call on all pastoral agents to give special attention to the family in their ministry, especially to families in distress. Let all parents and guardians take their responsibility more seriously, mindful of the fact that they are the very first agents of the human and religious formation of their families and wards. It is important to note that the fundamental human values, such as belief in God, the respect for life, the virtues of sincerity, honesty and hard work are acquired first from the home.

The Socio-Economic Life

Human beings are called to share in the creative works of God through their socio-economic activities which are meant to provide for the development and growth of a just and peaceful society. Our role as collaborators with God is fundamentally one of stewardship and not exploitation. We have a God-given task to protect and use the environment judiciously and with responsibility for future generations who equally have a stake in the world. The new evangelization requires inculcating this new mindset in all of us as we undertake our socio-economic activities. St Paul expresses vividly the way we misuse the resources of nature available to us as creation groaning for a release from corruption (cf. Rom 8, 19-23). It is in this light that we wish to renew our call for a conscious effort to save our arable land, water bodies, and forest reserves from destruction, e.g. the current spate of deforestation, illegal mining and bushfires in the Brong Ahafo Region where we have held our Plenary Assembly.

We are delighted to note the efforts being made by government and civil organizations to address the situation and call on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other such agencies to do more in the protection of the natural resources of the nation. We strongly exhort pastors in areas where these destructive activities are taking place to carry out and support advocacy programmes on behalf of the people whose lands and sources of livelihood are threatened by these activities. We call on our traditional leaders to resist the temptation of collaborating with the perpetrators of these crimes to

the detriment of the common good of their own people. We further plead with them to be circumspect in the way and manner some of them dispose of the land which they hold in trust for their people. They should consider very carefully the needs of future generations. The practice of leasing or selling the same piece of land to multiple applicants thereby creating conflict in the society should be avoided at all cost. We equally call on people engaged in these activities to be law abiding and to be conscious of the harm that they cause to the present and future generations of this country.

Civil and Political life

No area of human life is exempt from the light of the Gospel, therefore, it is important to note the urgent need of evangelization of the civil and political life of the country. The road to a civil and political society inspired by the Gospel values passes through the hearts of men and women who act in these areas. Hence, the hearts and consciences of our civil and political leaders must be attuned to the requirements of the common good and the welfare of the people they lead. The demands of the new evangelization require that they be men and women of proven integrity with sincere love for the welfare of the people they govern.

We call on all who are in public office to lead by example. They should stand out and conduct themselves with integrity and love for their

neighbour and the nation. Let them endeavour to influence others more by their honesty than by anything else.

7. The Challenges to evangelization

In-depth Knowledge of the Gospel

The new evangelization requires solid faith formation if it has to succeed. Evangelization and catechetical instruction as well as other faith formation activities need to go hand in hand and pastoral agents will therefore need to give special attention, especially to the religious formation of the youth. The Year of the Faith, fortunately, has helped to deepen our understanding of the perennial value of the Bible as well as the relevance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Social Doctrine of the Church and other Church documents. In order to ensure the study and effective application of the contents of these documents by the people of God, bishops and other pastoral agents should commit themselves to a more profound study and dissemination of these documents.

Inculturation

A faith that is not incarnated remains alien to the people to whom it is offered and proposed. The efforts of the Church in Ghana in promoting contextual theological reflection and inculturation have left much to be

desired. Our Ghanaian cultures are still in need of deeper theological reflection. More needs to be done, for instance, in promoting Christian understanding of funerals, marriages, chieftaincy and leadership in general. In this regard we call on the Catholic Theological Commission, the National Liturgical Commission and other such bodies to do more with a sense of urgency.

The Spirit of Materialism and Greed

“The love of money is the root of all evils and there are some who, pursuing it have wandered away from the faith..”(1 Tim 6: 10). This admonition of the Apostle Paul has a timely relevance for our Ghanaian society today. Money has taken the centre stage in all aspects of our life and this is having a telling effect on our society. This is a big challenge to the new evangelization. The desire to make quick money and by whatever means possible is bringing a huge social cost and untold suffering to the poor and vulnerable in our midst. It is in this light that we note with sadness the growing inequalities in our society fueled by corruption and other forms of malfeasance in recent times. Corruption comes in all forms and occurs in all places of our public and social life; it occurs in our Churches, in our educational institutions, our health facilities, etc. We are all culpable of what is happening in this country since advertently or inadvertently we stoke the fires of greed and materialism anytime we give or receive bribes, when we steal

Church, public and private funds or misuse public property for personal gain.

It is with great concern that we view the reports in the media about malfeasance in some of our public institutions. We call on the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) the Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO), and all other anti-corruption bodies mandated to protect the common good and purse and to fight graft in our public sector, to ensure public office-holders are held accountable for their actions. The current situation whereby investigations and prosecution of corrupt public officers-holders yield no concrete results is highly regrettable and seems to encourage further malpractices. We call on the Government to ensure that all the law enforcement agencies are properly resourced and given the free hand to carry out their statutory tasks and to avoid creating any impression in the minds of Ghanaians that Government condone and encourage a culture of impunity.

Ethnic Affiliations

Although a treasured gift from God to our dear nation, our ethnic diversity is becoming a threat to our survival as a nation and posing a big challenge to the message of the gospel. While it can be an opportunity to build a mosaic of new social relationships, we need as a matter of urgency to evangelize the way and manner that we perceive others who do not belong to the same ethnic or tribal group as we do.

This dangerous phenomenon of regarding others as “*not belonging to us*” (cf. Lk 9:49) is spreading like a canker in our towns, villages and cities, in our Christian communities and political parties. It is gradually destroying our sense of national identity and unity. We call on all men and women of good will to eschew any form of discrimination along the lines of creed, gender, ethnicity and status and to pursue the path that leads to harmony and mutual co-existence.

8. Conclusion

A Call to Prayer

In conclusion, let us recognize that God often precedes the evangelizer by making the evangelized receptive to the message of the Gospel. This means that evangelization must begin and end in prayer, asking the Lord to open the hearts of those who hear the message to receive it and bear abundant fruits. Equally important, is that the evangelizer must, first of all, have encountered the risen Lord before announcing Him to others. In this regard, we wish to exhort all Christians to intensify their prayer for the work of evangelization which in the final analysis is the work of the Holy Spirit.

May Mary, the Queen of the Apostles, be our sure guide and helper in leading us in our efforts to renew our faith and the face of our dear nation Ghana.

“May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may abound in hope (cf. Rom 15:13).

God bless our Homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong.

God bless you all!

MOST REV JOSEPH OSEI-BONSU
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