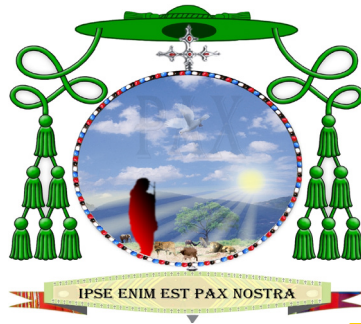


CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NGONG



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wisdom...”
(Col. 3:16)**

**PASTORAL LETTER
OF
RT. REV. JOHN OBALLA OWAA
The Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of
Ngong, Kenya**

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PASTORAL LETTER OF RT. REV. JOHN OBALLA OWAA

The Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ngong (Kenya)

**AT THE CONCLUSION
OF
“THE YEAR OF CATECHESIS”**

**“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teach and admonish one another in all
wisdom...”(Col 3:16)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings and Peace in the Lord!

As we conclude this blessed *Year of Catechesis* in our Diocese of Ngong, I write to you with a heart filled with gratitude and hope.

This year has been a time of profound renewal and grace as we have deepened our commitment to catechesis-the essential ministry of teaching and transmitting the faith.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Pastoral Coordinator Rev. Fr. Boniface Mukwe and his Team, to all priests, catechists, parish leaders, religious men and women, families, and faithful members of our community who have contributed to this fruitful endeavour.

I. “LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY, TEACH AND ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER IN ALL WISDOM...” (Col. 3:16)

In Colossians 3:16, St. Paul writes: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...” This verse is part of St. Paul’s exhortation to the Colossians on living a Christ-centred life.

This verse highlights the importance of immersing ourselves in the teachings of Christ, sharing wisdom, and encouraging one another in faith. It underscores the communal aspect of catechesis, where believers are called to instruct and support each other, fostering a deeper connection to the Word of God.

Let’s break down the key components of this passage:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”

“Word of Christ” refers to the teachings and message of Jesus, particularly the Gospel, the Gospel that Paul found constrained to preach. “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Paul emphasizes the importance of internalizing the teachings of the “word of Christ” so that they can shape one’s life and actions. Christ’s message should not just be known but should live deeply within believers, becoming a part of their identity.

The presence of Christ’s word should be thorough and complete within believers. This is a call for an ongoing, deep engagement with Scripture, allowing it to permeate every aspect of one’s life.

“Teaching and admonishing one another”

St Paul emphasizes the communal nature of Christian life by encouraging believers to teach and admonish one another. “Teaching and admonishing one another” implies an active and mutual sharing of the faith within the Christian community, where believers support each other in their spiritual growth. Teaching involves imparting knowledge, particularly about the doctrines and moral guidance found in Scripture and in the teachings of the Church. Admonishing goes further, implying a correction or gentle reproof. This is often aimed at helping others align their lives with Christian principles. The verse suggests that believers have a responsibility not only for their own growth but also to contribute positively to the growth of others in the love of God and love of neighbour. By teaching and admonishing one another, they build up the Church as a whole.

“In all wisdom”

Wisdom, in the biblical sense, is more than just knowledge; it includes understanding and living according to God’s will. Here, St. Paul calls for the exercise of wisdom in teaching and admonishing, indicating that these actions should be done thoughtfully, with discernment and compassion.

Wisdom is also closely connected with Christ, who is described in other parts of Scripture as the embodiment of God’s wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 1:15-17). Therefore, teaching and admonishing should be carried out in a Christ-like manner, reflecting His love and grace.

In the light of this Pauline teaching, it is evident that we, the Catholic faithful must continue to immerse ourselves deeply in the teachings of Christ and foster a community where faith is shared, taught, and upheld through mutual encouragement and wise guidance. The Word of God is transformative when it is allowed to “dwell richly” within us the people of God, shaping not only their individual lives but also their communal relationships, fostering growth and holiness within the Body of Christ. Yes, the *Year of Catechesis* is coming to an end; however, the journey continues.

II. REFLECTING ON OUR JOURNEY WE MADE DURING THE YEAR OF CATECHESIS

Throughout this year, we have revisited the core teachings of our faith and life, grounded in Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church. We have focused on knowing Christ more deeply and understanding the richness of our Catholic tradition. This journey has not only enriched our minds but also invigorated our hearts to live out our faith more fully in everyday life. Let us recall the various moments of our formative journey that we made during the *Year of Catechesis* resolving to keep walking along the same path for faith formation.

The Holy Scripture (April-May 2023)

We started our journey together last year. In the months of April and May we reflected on the central role of the Holy Scripture in the life of the Church and of every Catholic faithful.

The Church teaches that Scripture is not merely a historical document but the *living* Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and written through human authors. As stated in *Dei Verbum* (Word of God), the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* from the Second Vatican Council, Scripture is “the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 9). This highlights the unique nature of Scripture as both divine and human, a sacred text that reveals God’s plan of salvation and guides the faithful in their journey of faith.

For individual believers, Scripture serves as a spiritual nourishment and a source of divine wisdom. The Church encourages the faithful to read and meditate on the Word regularly, allowing it to shape their thoughts, actions, and moral decisions. Through Scripture, believers encounter Christ, grow in their understanding of God's love, and find guidance for living a holy and virtuous life. As emphasized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Scripture must be read within the *living* Tradition of the Church and interpreted under the guidance of the Magisterium (CCC 113). Thus, Scripture in the Catholic tradition is not only read but also lived, integrated into the liturgy, prayer, and everyday practice of faith.

The Liturgy (June - July 2023)

In the months of June and July last year, our study and reflection centred around the Liturgy. In Catholic teaching, liturgy is understood as the public worship of the Church, through which believers participate in the mysteries of Christ and engage in communal worship of the Triune God. It encompasses all forms of sacramental celebrations, with the Eucharist (the Mass) being the most significant and central act of liturgy. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, liturgy is “the participation of the people of God in ‘the work of God’” (CCC 1069), signifying its divine and communal dimensions. The liturgy, rooted in Christ's Paschal Mystery, is seen as a bridge between the divine and human, enabling believers to partake in the sacred and to be transformed by God's grace.

The liturgy holds a central place in the life of the Church because it is both the source and summit of Christian life. It is the source from which the Church draws strength and grace, and it is the summit toward which the entire mission of the Church is directed. In liturgy, believers encounter Christ sacramentally, especially in the Eucharist, where they are united with Him and with one another as one body.

This celebration of the Eucharist is not merely symbolic but an actual participation in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection made present *here and now*.

As emphasized in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the liturgy is where "the work of our redemption is accomplished" (SC 2), thus affirming its vital role in the Church's mission.

For individual believers, the liturgy offers a space to encounter God's love and grace, to receive spiritual nourishment, and to grow in communion with the Church. Through the repetition of prayers, readings, and rituals, believers are formed and nurtured in their faith. Liturgical celebrations like the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the other sacraments shape and direct the lives of the faithful by helping them align their lives with Christ. Engaging in the liturgy calls believers to live out the Gospel in their daily lives, inspiring them to acts of charity, justice, and holiness. Through this regular and communal worship, believers are not only reminded of their identity as God's children but are also empowered to carry Christ's love into the world.

Sacraments and Sacramentals (August-September 2023)

In Catholic teaching, sacraments are outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. The Church recognizes seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance (Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. Each sacrament plays a crucial role in the life of the Church and its members, as they facilitate a deeper encounter with Christ and a tangible experience of God's grace. Through the sacraments, believers are initiated into the Christian community, strengthened in their faith, and provided with the spiritual nourishment needed to live out their vocation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes that the sacraments are "sacred signs" that confer the grace they signify (CCC 1131), reinforcing the notion that participation in the sacraments is essential for the spiritual growth and sanctification of the faithful.

Sacramentals, on the other hand, are sacred signs that derive their efficacy from the prayer of the Church and are meant to prepare believers to receive various graces. Examples include blessings, holy water, rosaries, and crucifixes.

While sacramentals do not confer grace in the same way that sacraments do, they serve to deepen the faith of believers, to receive actual graces needed for day-to-day life, to receive divine protection, and foster a spiritual connection with the Church and its traditions. They play a vital role in personal devotion, enriching the daily lives of the faithful by calling to mind the sacred and helping believers live out their faith in a tangible way. Together, sacraments and sacramentals weave the spiritual life of the Church, grounding believers in their faith and fostering a vibrant, communal experience of God's presence in their lives.

The Commandments and the Church Precepts (October-November 2023)

In Catholic teachings, the commandments serve as fundamental moral guidelines that reflect God's will and are integral to the life of the Church and its believers. The Ten Commandments, as outlined in the Book of Exodus (Ex. 20:1-17) and reiterated in Deuteronomy (Deut. 5:4-21), provide a moral framework that governs the relationship between God and humanity, as well as interpersonal relationships. These commandments call believers to love God above all things and to love their neighbours as themselves, encapsulating the essence of Christian moral teaching. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes that the commandments are a "path to freedom" and enable the faithful to attain true happiness by living in accordance with God's plan (CCC 2052). Let no one mislead you to think that the Commandments of God limit your freedom and reduce your dignity as a human person. The opposite is the truth!

In addition to the commandments, the Church also establishes precepts to guide believers in their spiritual lives. The precepts of the Church are considered minimal obligations that help Catholics live out their faith more fully and foster their relationship with God and the community. These include attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, confessing sins at least once a year, receiving the Eucharist during the Easter season, providing for the needs of the Church, and observing the Church's laws on marriage.

As noted in the Catechism, these precepts are designed to support the spiritual life of the faithful and facilitate participation in the Church's sacramental life (CCC 2041-2043). Together, the commandments and Church precepts provide a moral compass and a structured framework that guide believers in their journey of faith, helping them to grow in holiness and community.

Social Teachings of the Catholic Church (December 2023)

The social teachings of the Catholic Church are rooted in the belief that all human life is sacred and that every individual has inherent dignity and worth, created in the image of God. These teachings emphasize the importance of promoting justice, peace, and the common good, addressing the needs and rights of individuals and communities. The foundational document for these teachings is *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things), issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, which responded to the social upheavals of the Industrial Revolution by advocating for the rights of workers and promoting the principle of solidarity. This encyclical laid the groundwork for a comprehensive body of social doctrine that has evolved through subsequent papal documents, such as *Quadragesimo Anno* (*In the 40th year*) of Pope Pius XI, *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) of Pope John XXIII, and *Centesimus Annus* (The Hundredth Year) of Pope John Paul II, each building on the principles of justice, human rights, and economic equity.

A core aspect of the Church's social teachings is the principle of the common good, which asserts that societal structures must be oriented toward promoting the well-being of all people, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable.

The Church advocates for a preferential option for the poor, emphasizing that the needs of the least among us must take precedence in decisions that affect society. Additionally, the Church's teachings call for respect for creation and environmental stewardship, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life and the responsibility of humans to care for the earth.

This holistic approach to social justice, encapsulated in documents like *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis, highlights the moral imperative to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change, urging believers to engage actively in promoting a just and equitable society. By integrating these teachings into the lives of believers, the Church seeks to inspire action and foster a community committed to living out the Gospel in the public sphere.

Environment (January 2024)

Taking care of the environment is a vital aspect of Catholic social teaching, reflecting the Church's commitment to stewardship of God's creation. The principle of stewardship emphasizes that humans have a responsibility to care for the Earth, recognizing that it is a gift from God intended for the benefit of all. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, highlights the interconnectedness of creation and the moral imperative to protect the environment for future generations. He calls for an ecological conversion, urging believers to recognize the impact of human actions on the planet and to adopt lifestyles that promote sustainability and respect for all forms of life (*Laudato Si*, 217).

Furthermore, the Church teaches that environmental issues are inherently tied to social justice. The degradation of the environment disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized, who often bear the brunt of ecological crises. Thus, caring for the environment is not just an ecological concern but a moral obligation to promote the dignity and rights of all people.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, states that “the material universe is at the service of humanity,” and it emphasizes the need for responsible management of resources to ensure the common good (CCC 2415).

By fostering an ethic of care and responsibility towards creation, the Church calls on its members to advocate for policies that protect the environment, promote sustainability, and enhance the quality of life for all.

Small Christian Communities and the Domestic Church (February 2024)

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) play a vital role in the life of the Church by fostering deeper relationships among believers and encouraging a communal expression of faith and charity. These communities, formed within parishes, provide a space for individuals to gather regularly for prayer, study of Scripture, and mutual support. This year we are celebrating the golden jubilee of the beginnings of SCCs in the AMECEA region (1973-2023) towards building the Church as Family of God in our region. Many of us grew up with the SCCs. We have much to thank God for this.

As emphasized in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, SCCs are instrumental in the New Evangelization, facilitating personal and communal growth in faith and discipleship. They offer opportunities for believers to share their experiences of God and to live out the Gospel in a more intimate and relational context, thereby enhancing the life of the parish and the wider Church (GDC 254).

In parallel, the concept of the “domestic Church” refers to the family as the first place where faith is nurtured and lived out. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the family is a community of grace and prayer, where parents have the primary responsibility to educate their children in the faith (CCC 2225).

The domestic Church reflects the larger Church in its commitment to worship, service, and love. Families are encouraged to engage in practices such as prayer, reading Scripture together, and participating in the sacraments, thereby fostering a strong faith foundation.

Together, SCCs and the domestic Church underscore the Church’s mission to create vibrant faith communities that nurture spirituality and discipleship, both at the family level and its neighbourhood. Through these communal and familial expressions of faith, believers can grow in their relationship with God and one another, fulfilling the call to be the Body of Christ in the world.

Prayer in the Christian Life (March 2024)

Prayer occupies a central place in the Christian life, serving as a means of communication with God and a vital aspect of personal and communal spirituality. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God, and it can take various forms, including adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise (CCC 2559).

Through prayer, believers enter into a relationship with God, fostering spiritual growth and deepening their faith. It is in prayer that Christians express their needs, seek guidance, and cultivate a profound sense of gratitude for God's blessings. It is in prayer that the Christians receive the love of God in our hearts.

The Scriptures emphasize the importance of prayer, with Jesus often retreating to pray and teaching His disciples the Lord's Prayer as a model for their own prayers (*Matt. 6:9-13*).

In addition to personal prayer, the Catholic tradition highlights the significance of communal prayer, especially within the liturgical context. The Eucharist is the highest form of communal prayer, where believers gather to celebrate the Mass and partake in the Body and Blood of Christ, reinforcing their unity as the Church. Prayer within Small Christian Communities and families also plays a crucial role in nurturing faith and fostering a sense of belonging.

Thus, prayer is not only a personal endeavour but also a communal activity that shapes the identity and mission of the Church. It is because of prayer, in Christ, with Christ and through Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit that we become one with our heavenly Father. We must strive to grow in this union with God daily. "Those who pray will be saved; those who do not pray will be lost" (CCC 2744 quoting *St. Alphonsus Liguori*).

Family Life Education (April-May 2024)

Family Life Education (*FLE*) is an integral aspect of the Catholic Church's commitment to fostering healthy family dynamics and promoting the sanctity of marriage and family life. Rooted in the teachings of the Church, *FLE* emphasizes the importance of values such as love, respect, and commitment within the family unit. The Church views the family as a “*domestic church*,” where faith is lived and nurtured, making education about family life essential for spiritual growth and moral development. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, parents have a primary responsibility for the education of their children, particularly in moral and spiritual matters (CCC 2223).

Family Life Education (*FLE*) encompasses various themes, including communication skills, conflict resolution, sexuality, family-finance, parenting and the dignity of human life. It aims to equip families with the necessary tools to navigate the challenges of contemporary society while upholding Catholic values. Programs often incorporate teachings from papal encyclicals, such as *Familiaris Consortio* (The Fellowship of the Family) by Pope Saint John Paul II, which underscores the mission of the family to be a sanctuary of life and love (FC 86). Additionally, the Church promotes the significance of sacramental grace in family life, emphasizing that participation in the sacraments strengthens familial bonds and fosters a deeper relationship with God. By providing resources and guidance for family life education, the Church seeks to empower families to fulfil their roles as the foundational unit of society and the first place where faith is nurtured and lived out.

The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Church (June-July 2024)

The Blessed Virgin Mary holds a unique and revered position in the life of the Church, serving as a model of faith and a powerful intercessor for believers. According to Catholic teaching, Mary is recognized as the Mother of God, having given birth to Jesus Christ, who is both fully divine and fully human.

This title underscores her vital role in salvation history and emphasizes the Church's belief in the Incarnation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that Mary's "yes" to God during the Annunciation (Luke 1:38) exemplifies profound faith and obedience, making her a model for all Christians (CCC 494). Moreover, her perpetual virginity, Immaculate Conception, and Assumption into heaven are dogmas that further highlight her special place within the Church's understanding of salvation.

Mary's role extends beyond her earthly life; she is seen as a compassionate intercessor who prays for the faithful. The Church encourages devotion to Mary through various forms, such as the Rosary and Marian feasts, which celebrate her unique relationship with Christ and her active participation in the Church's mission. As stated in *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations), one of the key documents from the Second Vatican Council, Mary is acknowledged as the "*Mother of the Church*," symbolizing her role in the spiritual motherhood of all believers and her nurturing presence within the Christian community (LG 61). Through her example and intercession, Mary invites believers to deepen their relationship with her Son, Jesus, encouraging a life of faith that mirrors her own. Thus, Mary serves as both a model of discipleship and a bridge connecting the faithful to the divine, reinforcing her significance in the life of the Church and its mission in the world.

The practice of the daily Rosary needs to be revived in our families and communities. In his Apostolic Letter, *The Rosary of the Virgin Mary*, Pope John Paul II encouraged families to pray the Rosary together. The Pope says the Rosary is a prayer of and for the family. He wrote: "At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance. We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary" (n. 41). He concluded his Letter thus: "Dear brothers and sisters! A Prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the Christian community."

Let us do so...I look to all of you, brothers and sisters of every state of life, to you, Christian families, to you the sick and elderly, and to you, young people: confidently take up the Rosary once again...May this appeal of mine not go unheard!” (n. 43)

The Creed: The Twelve Articles of Faith (August 2024)

The Creed, particularly the Nicene Creed that we normally recite on Sundays and Solemnities, serves as a foundational summary of Christian faith, articulating essential beliefs that unite the Catholic Church and the wider Christian community. Comprising twelve articles of faith, the Creed encapsulates core tenets about the nature of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. The opening articles affirm the belief in one God, the Creator of all things, and the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as His only Son, who became incarnate, suffered, died, and rose again for humanity’s salvation. The subsequent articles address the role of the Holy Spirit who too is worshipped and glorified, the importance of the Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life (CCC 194-197).

The Creed is not only a statement of faith but also a communal declaration that nourishes the spiritual life of believers and serves as a guideline for the Church’s teaching. It is recited during the Eucharistic celebration, reinforcing the unity of the faithful in their shared beliefs. The teachings of the Church encourage the faithful to delve deeper into each article, understanding how they shape Christian identity and practice.

This exploration can be seen in various Church documents, including the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which elaborates on the significance of each article, highlighting their implications for the life of believers (CCC 194-197). Through the Creed, Catholics affirm their commitment to the core principles of their faith, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity with the early Christian community. Faith, when rightly professed and lived, opens the doors of heaven for us.

Lay Apostolate and Devotional Groups (September 2024)

Lay apostolates and devotional groups are essential components of the Catholic Church's mission, emphasizing the active participation of laypeople in the life of the Church and society. Lay apostolates are initiatives where laypersons engage in various forms of ministry, advocacy, and outreach, addressing social, educational, and spiritual needs in their communities. This involvement reflects the Church's teaching that all members of the faithful share in Christ's mission, as articulated in *Lumen Gentium*, which states that laypeople have a unique role in evangelization and the promotion of justice in the world (LG 33). By participating in these apostolates, laypeople fulfil their baptismal call to be witnesses to Christ and to contribute to the building of God's Kingdom on Earth.

Devotional groups, on the other hand, provide spaces for prayer, reflection, and communal worship, fostering spiritual growth among participants. These groups often focus on specific devotions, such as the Rosary, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the charismatic renewal, the Divine Mercy, or the Associations like CMA and CWA, allowing members to deepen their relationship with God and cultivate a sense of community. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that such devotions and associations can enrich the spiritual life of the faithful, offering opportunities for personal conversion and collective action (CCC 1674).

Together, lay apostolates and devotional groups strengthen the Church's mission by encouraging lay involvement in both spiritual and social dimensions, allowing Catholics to live out their faith actively and in communion with others. These initiatives not only enhance individual spirituality but also contribute to the Church's overall mission to promote love, justice, and service in the world.

Sacred Music and Sacred Art (October 2024).

Sacred (*liturgical*) music and art play a pivotal role in the life of the Catholic Church, enriching the worship experience and deepening the spiritual engagement of the faithful.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the importance of liturgical music in its document *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which asserts that music can elevate the mind and heart toward God, enhancing the beauty of the liturgy (*SC 112*). Sacred music, whether choral or instrumental, serves to glorify God and foster a sense of community among worshippers, aligning with the Church's mission to promote a culture of worship. Additionally, the use of traditional hymns, Gregorian chant, and contemporary sacred music sung in our vernaculars offer diverse means for expressing faith and fostering participation in the liturgical celebration.

Similarly, sacred art-manifested through paintings, sculptures, stained glass, and architecture-has been a vital aspect of Catholic worship and catechesis. Art serves not only as a visual representation of the divine but also as a tool for teaching and deepening faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes that “sacred art is true and beautiful when its inspiration comes from faith” (*CCC 2502*). This art invites contemplation and prayer, allowing believers to encounter the sacred and reflect on the mysteries of faith. Together, sacred music and art create a holistic liturgical experience that engages the senses, nurtures spiritual growth, and communicates the truths of the faith, reinforcing the Church's mission to lead the faithful closer to God. Through these expressions, the Church not only preserves its rich heritage but also continues to inspire future generations in their journey of faith.

The initiative that we began from last year of the formation of the Choir members and the commissioning of 3300 members in the month of September this year is the way forward that we all must pursue. Let all choir members recognise that they are at the service of the liturgy helping the people of God taste the mystery of God Himself.

Dear God's family in the Diocese of Ngong:

Catechesis is the lifeblood of our mission as Christians. As Pope Francis has reminded us, catechesis is not simply about imparting knowledge, but about fostering a living encounter with Christ. In our rapidly changing world, catechesis must respond to the challenges of our times, guiding us in integrating faith with life and engaging meaningfully with the surrounding culture. This year, we have sought to achieve this through various initiatives, workshops, and community gatherings, all designed to deepen our faith and enable us to share it with others.

As we conclude this special year, I urge each of you to carry forward the spirit of catechesis. Let us remain steadfast in our commitment to growing in faith, standing firm and acting in love, as the Apostle Paul exhorts us in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14. I encourage families, parish communities, and individuals to continue studying, reflecting, and living the teachings of our Lord, always with a heart open to others and a spirit ready to serve. During the year of Catechesis, we carried the “tools” of catechesis—*Bible, Crucifix, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church* and the *Rosary*—representing the aspects of Christian faith, worship and life. May we not drop these “tools” but continue to carry them.

As the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Ngong, we shall continue our mission of “*teach[ing]* and *admonish[ing]* one another in all wisdom...” (Col. 3:16). Here, the *new Directory for Catechesis (2020)* with its *how-to* guidelines for catechesis which presents universal norms to guide pastors and catechists, can be of great help. First released in 1971 and then updated in 1997, this latest 2020 edition considers both the opportunities and the challenges which the Church faces in an ever more global and secular society. The 2020 *Directory for Catechesis* issued by the *Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization*, builds upon the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the ongoing work of the new evangelization. It offers comprehensive guidance on catechesis, focusing on how the Church can better transmit the faith in today's cultural context.

III. MOVING FORWARD AS A SYNODAL CHURCH

The Catholic Diocese of Ngong, as you are aware, covers a very large area, of approximately 39,619 square km in the Southern part of Rift valley, serving the Catholic faithful and others in the Counties of Narok and Kajiado in and through our 41 Parishes and institutions clustered in the seven deaneries of Kilgoris, Ololulunga, Narok, Ngong, Kiserian, Kajiado and Oloitokitok. Through our parishes and institutions, we take care of the pastoral needs of a population of 356, 693 Catholics - with Narok county comprising 152, 607 and Kajiado 204, 086, out of a total population of 2,275,713 (*as per the 2019 Census*).

Looking closely at these numbers, it is very evident that our task of evangelization and catechesis is immense. Only 15.67 % of the total population are now Catholic.

The priest-Catholic ratio is 1: 2,744 (i.e.1 priest for 2,744 Catholic faithful). Clearly, there is a lot of work that the Lord has entrusted into our hands. Nevertheless, thanks to Him, along with our priests, there are our dear Catechists and religious men and women serving in the Diocese doing a lot of work in the field of catechesis and pastoral care.

Let me now address each of the categories of faithful living or ministering in the Diocese.

To all the priests both diocesan and religious serving the people of God here in the Catholic Diocese of Ngong: I thank you sincerely for being my closest collaborators in serving the people of God here in this Archdiocese.

The General Directory for Catechesis affirms that the “Bishop has primary responsibility for catechesis in the particular Church” (*GDC* 222). In this my responsibility you have served as my hands, my mouth and my presence amidst the flock of Christ.

In your ministry as priests, you continue to feed the flock of Christ through your preaching and teaching, through the celebration of the sacraments, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Confession, and through your leadership roles.

Please continue to feed the people entrusted to your care. “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God*” (Col. 1:16).

To all the religious women and men ministering in the Diocese of Ngong: I thank you very sincerely for the service you render to the people of God through your prayer, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, institutes of higher learning, and the many forms of pastoral ministry you carry out. In all forms of apostolates, you are handing on the Christian faith and life to the next generation. May you be role models through your life of consecration and service. Let all of us discover through your lives, the joy of giving everything to Christ, giving “everything” that is precious to you. Your witness of life and service is a great gift to the Diocese of Ngong and to the whole Church.

To all our Catechists (who are over 700): I express my deepest gratitude for your dedication and service. You are the torchbearers of the faith, and your role is vital to the Church’s mission. You are the closest to the people. You prepare them to receive the holy sacraments, you preach the word when the priest is not available, you bring Holy Communion to the sick, you stay close to the bereaved, and do many other tasks. The work of evangelisation is mostly in your hands today. I encourage you to remain passionate and diligent, if necessary, seeking new ways to engage and inspire the faithful.

To all our children, in a special way all the children who belong to the *Pontifical Missionary Childhood* (PMC): You are beloved of Christ. He has planted in your hearts love for him. Continue to go to Jesus for he loves you and will take care of you. “Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to Me. Do not hinder them...’” (Mt. 19:14).

To all our young people: In the Post-Synodal Exhortation “Christ Is Alive” (*Christus Vivit*) of 2019, our Holy Father Pope Francis announced three great truths to all young people: Our God is a “God who is love”; “God loves you, never doubt this” (CV 112); and you can “find security in the embrace of your heavenly Father” (CV 113).

Taking a cue from the teaching of the Holy Father, I wish to urge you all, dear young people, to remain hopeful, refusing to give into desperation or despair. May you cultivate the virtue of purity, frequent the sacraments of Confession and Holy Eucharist, and become evangelizers and catechists to your peers. Through your love for Jesus, exemplary Christian life especially through diligence in your duties, and through your friendships many will come closer to Christ and his Church.

To the parents and guardians of our children and young people: As I thank you for your sacrificial life for the sake of your children and other family members, I remind you of your essential role as the first teachers of the faith. Your example and guidance will shape the future of our Church. As spouses, may you imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. Your witness as spouses who are loving and faithful to each other, and as caring parents to your children is one of the greatest witness that our society today needs. May you commit to live a chaste life within marriage, to a life-long fidelity, and to that form of sacrificial love that the Lord taught us. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13).

IV. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

The Blessed Virgin Mary is “a living catechism” and “the mother and model of catechists,” so says Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, n. 73). Her place in catechesis is important, first and foremost because she is and has been the privileged person and partner of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and is thus a permanent model and key for all catechesis. Mary is the one who helps us unravel divine revelation about the person of her Son Jesus.

One of the well-known titles of Mary is the title “Mother of the Church”. The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* highlights this aspect of Mary’s identity, indicating her maternal care for the Church and its mission (LG 61).

As Mother she nurtures the spiritual life of the faithful. As the Mother of the Church, she is seen as a mother to all believers, guiding them in their faith journey.

She is also addressed as “Seat of Wisdom” (*Sedes Sapientiae*). As *Seat of Wisdom*, Mary as the source of wisdom, Mary lives her role in teaching and guiding the faithful toward a deeper understanding of God. In catechesis, Mary exemplifies the virtues of contemplation and openness to divine truth, encouraging believers to seek wisdom through prayer and reflection.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is also spoken of as “Our Lady of Good Counsel”. Thus, our heavenly Mother encourages the faithful to seek her intercession when making life decisions. Her example as a listener and a follower of God’s will serves as a model for catechetical formation, inviting believers to cultivate discernment in their own lives.

She is also the “Star of the Sea” (*Stella Maris*). This means that Mary is a guiding star for Christians navigating the challenges of life.

In catechesis, Mary serves as a beacon of hope and faith, helping believers to navigate their spiritual journeys with confidence and trust in God’s providence.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is also known as the “*Queen of Apostles*”. As Queen of Apostles, she has a special role in the mission of the Church and her connection to evangelization. As the first disciple, she models how to proclaim the Gospel through actions and words, serving as a model for catechists and those engaged in the mission of teaching the faith.

These titles of Mary enrich our understanding of her within the context of catechesis, encouraging a deeper appreciation of her role in the Church and her influence on the spiritual formation of the faithful.

V. CONCLUSION: GRATITUDE AND BLESSINGS

Concluding this Pastoral Letter, I thank you all for your participation in this Year of Catechesis. May the Holy Spirit continue to enlighten our minds and inflame our hearts as we journey together in faith.

Let us go forth, “standing firm in faith, acting in love,” as we build a vibrant, Christ-centred community in the Diocese of Ngong.

Together with you all, I pray for another time the prayer that we have been reciting throughout the Year of Catechesis:

O God, it is your will that all people come to the knowledge of the Truth and be saved.

We ask you to fill our hearts with the fire of your love so that we may always learn and understand the true and holy teachings of your Son Jesus Christ, and of your Holy Church, and get to live and implement them in our lives, until we enter into eternal life with you in Heaven.

May you to continue to bless each one of us by the grace of your Holy Spirit so that we may strive to fully configure our lives to Christ. Grant all who have not yet heard the Gospel the grace to know, love and serve you in Truth and Spirit all the days of their lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May Almighty God bless you, keep you, and guide you always in His love.

In Christ, Our Saviour and Lord,

Your Shepherd,

+ Rt. Rev. John Oballa Owaa

Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ngong

