



*Embracing Simplicity, Promoting Peace:  
St. Francis, a Model for Nigeria*

**PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SPECIAL  
JUBILEE YEAR OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

**PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SPECIAL  
JUBILEE YEAR OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF  
BENIN CITY**

**“LORD, MAKE US INSTRUMENTS OF YOUR PEACE: RENEWING THE CHURCH  
THROUGH PEACE, RECONCILIATION, CARE FOR CREATION, AND MISSION.”**

I. The Jubilee Year of St. Francis: The Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi (2026–2027): The Holy See, through the Apostolic Penitentiary and with the approval of Pope Leo XIV, officially proclaimed a Special Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi, to be celebrated from 10 January 2026 to 10 January 2027, marking the 800th anniversary of the *Transitus* (death) of St. Francis of Assisi (1226–2026).

2. Through this Jubilee celebration, the Holy Father invites the entire Church to rediscover and imitate the spirituality and witness of St. Francis by embracing the evangelical values that characterized his life and mission: holiness of life, evangelical poverty, peace and reconciliation, care for creation, fraternity, charity toward the poor, and joyful witness to Christ. The Jubilee Year therefore stands as a privileged moment of grace and renewal for the universal Church, calling the faithful to a deeper conversion to the Gospel and renewed commitment to the mission of Christ in the world. Furthermore, the Apostolic Penitentiary granted to the faithful the possibility of obtaining a Plenary Indulgence during the Jubilee Year under the usual conditions established by the Church, namely: Sacramental Confession; Reception of the Holy Eucharist; Prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father; and Pilgrimage to churches, shrines, or places dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi or associated with the Franciscan family. This Jubilee thus becomes not only a commemoration of the life and witness of St. Francis but also an invitation to spiritual renewal, reconciliation, and a deeper participation in the life of grace offered by the Church.

3. The Archdiocese of Benin City prayerfully sets aside this pastoral year to reflect on the spirituality, witness, and missionary example of St. Francis of Assisi. In a world marked by violence, corruption, economic hardship, environmental decline, family instability, insecurity, and spiritual apathy, the Church presents St. Francis as a model of holiness, simplicity, reconciliation, care for creation, evangelical poverty, and joyful witness to Christ.

4. The Year of St. Francis seeks to renew the spiritual life of the faithful, deepen commitment to the Gospel, strengthen ecclesial communion, promote peace and justice in society, encourage responsible care for creation, and inspire renewed missionary discipleship throughout the Archdiocese of Benin City.

5. Guided by our episcopal vision expressed in the motto, *Ut testimonium perhibeam veritati*, “*That I may bear witness to the truth*” (Jn 18:37), this Pastoral Letter seeks to provide direction for how we, as a local Church, may fruitfully celebrate the Jubilee Year of St. Francis. St. Francis of Assisi stands before the Church as an enduring witness to peace, reconciliation, simplicity, love for creation, and total dedication to Christ. He recognized

creation as a reflection of the goodness and glory of God. His love for creatures always led him to deeper love of the Creator. In the same spirit, our care for creation must never remain merely environmental; it must become a spiritual responsibility rooted in gratitude to God and stewardship of His gifts.

6. The ecological challenges confronting our land demand urgent attention. In Edo State, we have experienced firsthand the devastating effects of environmental degradation. We have witnessed the destructive impact of erosion on roads, homes, and communities. We have seen the consequences of poor waste management on our environment and public health. We have also experienced the effects of deforestation and the loss of natural vegetation that God has provided for the protection and sustenance of human life, especially in the face of increasing heat and the realities of global climate change.

7. The care of our common home is therefore not optional; it is both a moral and spiritual responsibility. This Jubilee Year should challenge all of us, government authorities, institutions, communities, and individual citizens, to embrace greater ecological responsibility and work together for the preservation and renewal of our environment. St. Francis was equally a great promoter of reconciliation and peace. At a time when our society is marked by conflict, division, injustice, insecurity, and social tensions, this Jubilee invites us to become true instruments of peace and reconciliation.

8. I therefore urge every faithful of the archdiocese to begin this journey of peace from within: from our families, our places of work, our parishes, and our communities. Seek out someone with whom you have lost contact, someone from whom you have become estranged, and make a renewed commitment to peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Peace cannot flourish without justice. Consequently, one important area demanding our reflection and pastoral attention during this Jubilee Year is our criminal justice system. Many of our brothers and sisters currently held in correctional facilities remain awaiting trial. The burden placed upon the judicial system often results in prolonged detention, leaving many without timely access to justice and without the opportunity to have their cases adequately heard.

9. In this regard, I wish to commend the good works already undertaken by the Catholic Lawyers Association and encourage them to continue and to intensify this apostolate during the Jubilee Year. I invite them to make assistance to people in correctional facilities a particular priority of this celebration, working toward legal support, access to justice, and the reintegration of those who return to society.

10. At the same time, I encourage constructive engagement with government institutions and relevant agencies so that collaborative and humane solutions may be developed in this area. We must also explore creative and pastoral ways to welcome, rehabilitate, and reintegrate our brothers and sisters after their release, helping them rediscover dignity, hope, and their rightful place within society. May this Jubilee Year of St. Francis renew in us a deeper commitment to peace, justice, reconciliation, care for creation, and the transformation of society through the light of the Gospel.

11. To every lay apostolate group in the Archdiocese of Benin City, I strongly urge you to say the prayer for the Jubilee of St. Francis. Let this prayer be said at all your gatherings, and parish priest should ensure that they are said from June 2026 to January 2027 at the close of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis.

**12. Prayer for the Jubilee of St. Francis of Assisi (By Pope Leo XIV)**

*Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago  
Went to meet Sister Death as a man of peace,  
Intercede for us before the Lord.  
You recognized true peace in the Crucifix of San Damiano  
Teach us to seek in Him the source of reconciliation  
That breaks down every wall.*

*You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding,  
Give us the courage to build bridges  
Where the world raises up boundaries.  
In this time afflicted by conflict and division,  
Intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers:  
Unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ. Amen!*

13. This Pastoral Letter is intended to provide guidance and direction for the celebration of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis within our local Church. It seeks to animate and unify our pastoral efforts so that this sacred time may become a true season of grace, renewal, and missionary transformation for the archdiocese. Therefore, I call upon all priests, consecrated persons, knights and ladies, the lay faithful, men and women, youth, and children to open their hearts to the graces and indulgences attached to this Jubilee Year and allow them to renew and strengthen our collective commitment to becoming instruments of peace in our world.

14. At a time marked by violence, division, social unrest, materialism, and growing indifference, this Jubilee invites us to embrace more deeply the Gospel values exemplified by St. Francis of Assisi – peace, reconciliation, simplicity, charity, fraternity, and care for creation.

15. The Archdiocesan program for this Jubilee Year therefore places particular emphasis on **prophetic witness, reconciliation, pastoral charity, youth formation, missionary discipleship, and Gospel-centred social transformation**. Through these pastoral priorities, we seek to renew families, strengthen communities, deepen faith, and inspire a more courageous Christian witness within society.

May this Jubilee become for the Archdiocese of Benin City a grace-filled journey of spiritual renewal, reconciliation, and missionary commitment, leading all the faithful to proclaim Christ through lives marked by peace, holiness, and service.

**I. GENERAL OBJECTIVES:** The Jubilee Year of St. Francis aims to: Promote deeper conversion to Christ through prayer, penance, and sacramental life. Foster peace, reconciliation, and unity within families, parishes, and society. Encourage simplicity of life

and evangelical detachment from materialism. Strengthen ecological awareness and care for creation. Inspire compassionate outreach to the poor, sick, prisoners, migrants, and vulnerable people. Renew missionary zeal and evangelization efforts. Promote integrity, justice, and moral responsibility in public life. Encourage youth participation in the life and mission of the Church. Deepen Eucharistic spirituality and devotion. Strengthen collaboration among clergy, religious, and lay faithful.

**II. SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION:** These scriptural texts should serve as points of reflection at family and societal meetings. Key Biblical Texts

Matthew 5:9 — “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Luke 9:23 — “Take up your cross daily and follow me.”

Galatians 6:14 — “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of Christ.”

Romans 12:21 — “Overcome evil with good.”

Psalm 24:1 — “The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains.”

Matthew 25:35–40 — “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine...”

**III. MAJOR PASTORAL THEMES:** These themes should be the focal point of reflection given in seminars of priest at deanery meetings, CMO, CWO, CYON, NFCS etc.

1. Peace and Reconciliation

Prayer initiatives for peace in Nigeria

Reconciliation within families and communities

Interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence

Campaign against violence, cultism, kidnapping, and corruption

2. Simplicity and Holiness of Life

Teaching on Christian stewardship

Combating materialism and greed

Franciscan spirituality workshops

Witness of joyful simplicity

3. Care for Creation

Environmental sanitation projects

Tree planting initiatives

Ecological education in schools and parishes

Promotion of responsible use of resources

4. Charity and Preferential Love for the Poor

Outreach to prisons, hospitals, orphanages, and internally displaced people

Parish food banks

Support for widows and unemployed youth

Medical outreach programs

5. Eucharistic and Sacramental Renewal

Eucharistic adoration

Frequent confession campaigns

Parish retreats and missions  
Liturgical renewal programs

6. Evangelization and Mission  
Door-to-door evangelization  
Digital evangelization initiatives  
Revival of Small Christian Communities  
Youth missionary outreach

#### **IV. THE STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES**

##### **A. Opening of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis**

**Date:** *Friday, June 12, 2026*

**Venue:** *St. Francis Catholic Church, Ekenhuan Road, Benin City*

The Jubilee Year of St. Francis in the Archdiocese of Benin City shall be solemnly inaugurated with an Archdiocesan celebration centered on prayer, peace, evangelization, and spiritual renewal.

The opening celebration shall include:

- **Solemn Pontifical Mass** for the official inauguration of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis.
  - **Official launch of the Archdiocesan Prayer for the Year of St. Francis**, to be used throughout the Archdiocese during the Jubilee Year.
  - **Presentation and inauguration of the Official Archdiocesan Hymn** for the Jubilee celebration.
  - **Consecration of the Archdiocese to the ideals of peace, charity, simplicity, and evangelical witness embodied by St. Francis of Assisi.**
  - **Pastoral presentation of the Archdiocesan Program for the Jubilee Year**, outlining the major spiritual, pastoral, charitable, ecological, and evangelization initiatives planned for the year.
  - **Planting of a tree at St. Francis Catholic Church, Ekenhuan Road, Benin City.**
- This opening celebration shall mark the beginning of a grace-filled journey of renewal for the entire Archdiocese, calling all the faithful to become instruments of Christ's peace in the Church and society.

##### **B. Celebrating the *Transitus* (Death) of St. Francis**

**Date:** *Saturday, October 3, 2026*

**Venue:** *Franciscan Monastery, Okokhuo*

This event, which takes the form of a pilgrimage to the Franciscan Monastery, Okokhuo is an important milestone in the celebration of this Jubilee in our Archdiocese. Precisely, this date marks the *Transitus* (death) of St. Francis, exactly 800 years ago. It presents Christ's faithful of the Archdiocese an opportunity to encounter this holy man in one of his legacy foundations. It also provides an occasion for the gaining of a plenary indulgence, which is a foremost spiritual fruit of the Jubilee Year.

This *Transitus* celebration shall include:

- A moment of **personal reflection and encounter.**
- Opportunity for **reconciliation and conversion.**
- An appreciation of the **spiritual legacies of St. Francis.**
- **Solemn Pontifical Mass** of the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi.

### C. Closing of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis

**Date:** Friday, January 1, 2027

**Venue:** Benin Correctional Facility

This Special Jubilee of St. Francis of Assisi terminates in the company of our brothers and sisters at the correctional centre. It presents us an opportunity to share in their joys and their anxieties at the beginning of a new year. It is a simple yet profound reminder of our human frailties, a deep reflection into the state of our relationship with God, a call to simplicity and peace-building, stimulating works of charity, conveying respect for the dignity of the human person and a re-awakening of our responsibility to care for creation.

### V. MONTHLY PASTORAL THEMES

| Month     | Theme                             | Major Activities   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--|
| June      | Conversion and Renewal            | Opening Mass, Retreats at deanery levels, Tree planting                      |
| July      | Vocation and Mission              | Promotion of vocations, Parish-based evangelization                          |
| August    | Simplicity and Outreach           | Outreach to indigent families, Support to the vulnerable                     |
| September | Justice and Social Transformation | Study of <i>Laudato si</i> , Reflections on nonviolence, peace and dialogue  |
| October   | Reconciliation and Encounter      | Pilgrimage, Transitus and Legacy   |
| November  | Education and Care for Creation   | School-based academic interactions and parish-based environmental sanitation |
| December  | Compassion and Charity            | Visitation to hospitals and IDP camps  |
| January   | Mercy and Missionary Discipleship | Prison apostolate and thanksgiving   |

### VI. ROLE OF VARIOUS GROUPS

We call upon every parish, institution, apostolate, and ecclesial group within the archdiocese to participate actively in the programs outlined in this Pastoral Letter and in the practical guidelines and implementation framework that shall be developed by the Archdiocesan Committee for the celebration of the Jubilee Year in accordance with this pastoral plan.

#### Clergy

- Promote Franciscan spirituality through preaching, catechesis, and pastoral ministry.
- Encourage sacramental renewal, especially Eucharistic devotion and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Lead initiatives for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and pastoral outreach.

#### **Consecrated Persons**

- Offer retreats, recollections, and spiritual formation programs.
- Coordinate charitable and social outreach initiatives.
- Promote the witness of consecrated life and evangelical simplicity.

#### **Laity**

- Participate actively in evangelization and missionary initiatives.
- Promote peace, reconciliation, and Christian witness within families, workplaces, and society.
- Support Archdiocesan charitable and pastoral works.

#### **Youth**

- Lead environmental and ecological awareness campaigns.
- Promote moral integrity, responsible citizenship, and Christian leadership.
- Engage actively in missionary outreach and evangelization initiatives.

#### **Catholic Schools**

- Organize debates, essay competitions, and educational programs on Franciscan spirituality and values.
- Promote ecological awareness and environmental education.
- Establish charity, peace, and justice clubs within schools.

### **VII. LITURGICAL AND SPIRITUAL RESOURCES**

To facilitate the spiritual and pastoral celebration of the Jubilee Year, the Archdiocese shall prepare and make available the following resources:

- **Official Prayer for the Jubilee Year of St. Francis** for use in parishes, institutions, apostolates, and family gatherings.
- **Official Archdiocesan Hymn for the Jubilee Year**, where possible, reflecting the themes of peace, reconciliation, missionary discipleship, and care for creation (the archdiocesan chaplain of the choir to work with the choir on this matter).
- Liturgical and devotional materials to support the celebration throughout the archdiocese.

### **VIII. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL EVANGELIZATION**

In response to contemporary pastoral realities and in accordance with the Church's teaching on social communication, the archdiocese shall strengthen its evangelizing mission through digital and media initiatives.

The following initiatives are encouraged:

- Publication of **monthly reflections** in Archdiocesan newspapers and digital platforms on themes related to the Jubilee Year.
- Production of **short videos and media content on Franciscan spirituality and witness**.
- **Youth digital catechesis programs**, coordinated by the Office of the Youth Chaplain.
- Promotion of responsible and ethical use of digital media for evangelization and pastoral formation.

## **IX. EXPECTED FRUITS OF THE JUBILEE YEAR**

At the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, the Archdiocese hopes to witness the following fruits:

- Greater spiritual renewal and deeper commitment to the Gospel.
- Stronger family life and greater reconciliation within homes and communities.
- Increased Eucharistic devotion and sacramental participation.
- Greater peace, unity, and social harmony.
- Increased concern and practical outreach to the poor and vulnerable.
- Greater ecological awareness and environmental responsibility.
- Renewed missionary consciousness and evangelizing zeal.
- More active participation of young people in the life and mission of the Church.
- Stronger moral witness and Christian responsibility within society.

**X. CONCLUSION:** The Jubilee Year of St. Francis presents the Archdiocese of Benin City with a providential moment of grace and a unique opportunity for spiritual renewal, pastoral revitalization, and missionary renewal. It invites the entire People of God to rediscover the enduring values embodied in the life and witness of St. Francis of Assisi: peace, reconciliation, simplicity, charity, justice, care for creation, and evangelical holiness.

Through the example and intercession of St. Francis, the faithful are called to become authentic instruments of peace in a world wounded by division, violence, injustice, materialism, and indifference. This Jubilee therefore challenges every member of the local Church, bishops, priests, consecrated persons, and lay faithful, to embrace more deeply the Gospel of Christ and to renew their commitment to lives of prayer, service, fraternity, and missionary discipleship.

May this sacred year renew the archdiocese in faith, strengthen communion among the faithful, deepen Eucharistic devotion, and inspire a more courageous witness to the Gospel in society. May our families become schools of peace, our parishes centres of reconciliation and evangelization, our youths witnesses of holiness and integrity, and our communities places where charity and justice flourish. As we journey through this Jubilee Year, may the spirit of St. Francis continue to inspire the Archdiocese of Benin City to proclaim Christ through lives marked by humility, simplicity, fraternity, and service. May the Lord make us instruments of His peace.

**Sincerely Yours in Christ,**



**+Augustine Obiora Akubeze**  
**Archbishop of Benin City**  
**12 June 2026**