Meeting with Bishops Presidents of Episcopal Conferences and Caritas in Africa

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The mission of Caritas Africa in the light of the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Africae Munus”

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OUTLINE
Introduction
Mission of caritas
Caritas Africa and Africae Munus
Role of bishops in relation to caritas
Role of priests in relation to Caritas
Role of the laity in relation to caritas
Reflecting on the objectives of Caritas today
Conclusion

Introduction
Inspired by her founder who says in the gospel of Mathew “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me”¹, the church sees charity expressed in particular through attending to the poor and vulnerable as part of her evangelizing mission. This practice was common in the early Church when St. Paul spent some time making collections for the church in Jerusalem. The collection has been described as occupying a “central place in Paul’s work among gentile churches... becoming a defining emblem of his apostolate.”² It is argued that it was certainly “one of Paul’s most ambitious hands-on projects,” looming large within the Corinthian and Roman letters, “both theologically and practically.”³ This is evident from 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 where Paul had instructed Galatian converts to set aside money on the first day of each week for the collection.⁴ The willingness of Paul to devote his energy on such noble work is evidenced by his concern for vulnerable in the early church hence became an integral part of his apostolic mission. Many Scholars are widely in agreement that at least sections of the Jerusalem church in the first century

¹ The African Bible. Mathew 25: 35-36 pg 1679
⁴ Sze-Kar (2000), p 193-4
experienced “chronic poverty”\(^5\) and is not different from the church in Africa. The current Christians can learn a lot from him and specifically about preferential option for the poor.

This fact was again emphasized by Pope John Paul II when he proclaimed Caritas as an organization of public domain. It is for this that Deus Caritas stresses that “The Church can never be exempted from practicing charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love”\(^6\). From this understanding, one can rightly say that for the Church “charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being”\(^7\). This is a clear indication that whatever activities caritas engages in should be aimed at establishing the kingdom of God on earth, the kingdom of love. It is in this kingdom where people experience and enjoy the fullness of God’s glory. The kingdom of God entails freedom from poverty, diseases, hunger, and ignorance of all forms, injustices, conflicts, corruption and all activities and things that demean the human dignity. This mission is drawn from Christ’s own mission as stated in Luke 4: 18ff “the spirit of the lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year acceptable to the Lord”\(^8\). For the church to be able to achieve this, the bishops have to take responsibility for they are the chief shepherds of the flock in their dioceses\(^9\) and have to mobilize their flock to live a life of charity animated by love.

In recognizing the importance of charity Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that “no society, however developed it may be can do without fraternal service inspired by love”\(^10\) and added further by quoting Deus Caritas Est that “whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such; there will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness; there will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable”\(^11\). For him “it is love that soothes hearts that are hurt, farloned or abandoned. It is love which brings or restores peace to human hearts”\(^12\). Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level. As a community, the

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\(^6\) Deus Caritas Est no 29

\(^7\) Ibid


\(^9\) According to Benedict XVI, St, Cyprian of Carthage stated that the church rests on the bishops, and all her conduct follows the direction of those same rules

\(^10\) Africae Munus no 29.

\(^11\) Deus Caritas est (2005). no 28

\(^12\) Africae Munus no 29
Church must practice love and thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community, no wonder the church thought of establishing Caritas. The awareness of this responsibility made the church to share their property and live in a community as indicated in Acts "all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need"\textsuperscript{13}.

Unfortunately we realize that in almost all human dealings, the person is used as a means to an end and yet he should be the purpose for which all types of works and activities are done. What is saddening is that even at certain levels Caritas the charitable arm of the church which is expected to show respect for human dignity sometimes uses the poor people to get funding which in some instances is not used to help them but to enrich those running the organizations. Consequently, the focus of evangelization for which caritas is made for shifts to money making ventures and this poses a challenge as to what kind of people are in charge of the caritas organizations in different dioceses. “In Africa’s present situation, the church is called to make the voice of Christ heard”\textsuperscript{14} and this can be accomplished in a better way by Caritas for through charity, Christ’s love can be experienced by humanity. This will only be possible if the bishops realize and reaffirm the evangelical role by revisiting the objectives as to why Caritas was found and make its activities part of the pastoral program.

This paper aims at taking us back to reflect on why Caritas organizations in the church reflect on whether it is still on the right track, and then focus on role of the different members in making charity realized by all the people. Further it will reflect on how the church in Africa through Caritas can be in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace and the challenges faced in this endeavor and finally propose some suggestions for action.

**Mission of caritas**

In his opening statement in Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI put it strongly that Love- Caritas is “an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a sign that has its origin in God, Eternal love and Absolute Truth\textsuperscript{15}”. Love is therefore not a mere command but a response to the gift of love of God to humanity for God loved us\textsuperscript{16} Since Caritas is a sign of God’s love for humanity in Jesus Christ it is at the heart of the Church’s mission, and aims at serving the world’s poor. It seeks for a world where “the voices of the poor are heard and acted upon, where each person is free to flourish and live in peace and dignity, where natural environment is managed responsibly and sustainable in the interests of the entire human family”\textsuperscript{17}. This is what prophet Micah stressed to the

\textsuperscript{13} Acts 2: 44ff
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid no 30
\textsuperscript{15} Caritas In Veritate no 1
\textsuperscript{16} Cf 1 Jh 4:10
\textsuperscript{17} Caritas international strategic framework 2011-2015
people of Israel in his final prophecy when he said “the Lord requires of you only to do right and love goodness and to walk humbly with your God”\textsuperscript{18} and as such Caritas cannot divorce from this fact of working for a peaceful and just society. To carry out her work, Caritas draws inspiration from the scriptures, Catholic Social Teaching and the experiences and hopes of people who are disadvantaged and living in poverty. Their major objective is to assist its members in spreading charity and Social justice in the world. It does this by:

- Stimulating and aiding national Caritas organizations to participate, by means of active charity, in the assistance, advancement, and integral development of the most underprivileged, within an overall pastoral programme;
- Studying, if possible with other international organizations, the problems arising from poverty in the world, investigate the causes, and propose solutions in accordance with justice and the dignity of the human person, and encourage national Caritas organizations to undertake study and research in collaboration with each other;
- Fostering, with the approval of the local hierarchy, the foundation of a national charitable organization in those countries where no such organization exists, and, if necessary, contribute towards its development;
- Promoting collaboration between Member Organizations and the coordination of their international activities, without infringing on their autonomy;
- Participating in the efforts of all people to better their individual and collective standards of living, in order to achieve full human development;
- Encouraging and coordinating relief work by Member Organizations in cases of disaster, whenever and wherever particular events require emergency intervention
- Attaining cooperation with other international aid and development organizations as far as possible.

Since Caritas International cannot do all the charity work from one central place, the statutes allow that they form regional caritas organizations hence the justification of Caritas Africa.

\textbf{Caritas Africa and Africae Munus}

Caritas Africa is the competent agency of the Church in Africa for charitable activities on the continental level. This agency has a big role to play not only by charitable deeds but especially in bringing about a just society. This conviction is based on the claim that “…the poor do not need charity but justice. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the status quo, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity\textsuperscript{19}. In his address to Caritas Africa during the 7\textsuperscript{th} international Conference in Rome, , Cardinal (by then Archbishop) Onaiyekan observed that in most cases poverty is

\textsuperscript{18} The African Bible. Micah, 6: 6-8 pg 1579.
\textsuperscript{19} Deus caritas est no 26
mainly a result of bad management of the nations’ human and natural resources, which
generate injustice, both internal and international levels and further compounds the
problem of poverty. He noted that quite often, the unjust situation leads to conflict of
all kinds: social, ethnic, religious and political. This already indicates Caritas Africa is not
only to concentrate on charity work but also fight the structures that bring the injustices
that the African continent is experiencing. These problems were also identified in
Eclessia Africa when it was affirmed that “One common situation, without any doubt, is
that Africa is full of problems. In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic
mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social
disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars, despair. In a world
controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant
appendix, often forgotten and neglected”. By engaging fully in this fight Africa will be
able to attain development which for Pope Paul VI is a new name for peace.

It is with regard to this that Africæ Munus calls Africa to the service of reconciliation,
justice and peace and therefore remains a relevant document to Caritas whose major
concern is the poor and the spreading of charity and social justice in the world. Africa
which is faced with a lot of evils and suffering cannot attain true peace unless justice
issues are addressed. As she works for charity there is need to build a just social order in
which all receive their share of the world’s goods and no longer have to depend on
charity. This is the true freedom that the children of God should share in and Caritas
Africa has to be instrumental. It is therefore the task of the church through Caritas to
“form upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice so as to produce men and
women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct”. For
this to happen, Caritas Africa should never lose sight of this key issue as they carry
out their duties. By so doing, she will be bearing witness to the fact that “the social
horizon opened up by Christ’s work based on love surpasses the minimum demands of
human justice”. They must help to create a just society where all people share in the
goods and resources of the earth given to us by our creator which is only possible
through love. Revolution of love which Christ stressed in his ministry entails giving
“preferential attention to the poor, the hungry, the sick, the stranger, the
disadvantaged, the prisoner, the immigrant, the refugees or displaced persons” and all
the vulnerable. Caritas Africa has therefore a big responsibility of providing service to
these persons who also deserve a life of dignity since they are too created in the image
and likeness of God. It is the responsibility of all members of the church (bishops,
priests, religious and the laity) to take an active role in bringing about charity in the
world through different forms
Caritas Africa and the bishops in light of Africae Munus

It is worth noting that the Catholic Episcopal Conferences in Africa have taken upon themselves the responsibility of bringing about social justice in their respective countries. They have done it by allowing Caritas organizations to engage fully in these issues. To illustrate this, for example, within the Church in Eastern Africa, among these are Caritas Kenya which was launched in 2000. This has made advances in revitalizing capacity for effective development programming to respond to the rampant poverty, declining agricultural yields and consequent food shortage, climate change and environmental degradation and frequent disaster occurrences, diminishing water resources, increasing inequalities across regions, gender, and classes, and HIV/AIDS Pandemic with an aim of contributing towards poverty reduction. Caritas Kenya as a socio-pastoral expression of the ecclesial community continues to make efforts to promote the social-pastoral mission of the church in the promotion of sustainable integral development and is in line with the aim of Caritas international. In its livelihoods programme Caritas Kenya focuses on food security, microfinance initiative, farming & alternative (non-farm) livelihoods, environment and climate change, water and sanitation. In the Humanitarian Programme it aims at coordinating Catholic Church emergency preparedness, Disaster Management, Mitigation and Response programmes in Kenya.

Caritas Uganda which is the socio-pastoral arm of the Catholic Church in Uganda was established in 1958 with its core mission of fostering community initiatives that promote integral development. Like Caritas Kenya, it aims at helping through improving access to food, and promoting initiatives such as democracy building, gender equality and HIV and AIDS eradication. Caritas Uganda is involved in projects addressing HIV and AIDS prevention, peace-building, access to water and sanitation, environmental stewardship, and enhancement of livelihoods. The organisation is also involved in awareness-raising in areas such as human rights, HIV and AIDS and good governance with a view towards greater self-sufficiency. Other work includes setting up a Research and Advocacy Unit that provides people in the Catholic Church with information about poverty and justice issues, thereby empowering them to advocate change. Caritas Uganda’s aims of serving humanity creating a more just society, contributing to translating the Christian message of love of neighbour, compassion and solidarity into contemporary actions for the sake of the poorest in society, responding to acute human needs and capacity development of the beneficiaries and institutional strengthening.

Caritas Tanzania was established in 1971 by the decision of the Tanzania Episcopal conference with intent to co-ordinate charitable as well as social development projects. It assists communities and individuals in need in the areas of emergency situations, overwhelmed by poverty or handicapped by physical disabilities. It is engaged in both relief and development work. In order to perform its activities, Caritas Tanzania has divided itself into three sections namely, Emergency and Relief, Women in Development and Child Care, Development and Youth Section. Each of the sections is co-ordinating and or facilitates various programs which reach millions of people in the areas of relief
and development. It does this in collaboration with the International Caritas Network, the Government of Tanzania, the UN system and local community leadership. These three countries are just cited as examples to show the impact that Caritas has made in the society. However the challenge that we pose is whether all these activities form part of the pastoral plan of the various conferences and consequently the dioceses. The business of the church has to be done differently with a key focus on charity otherwise they will not be different from other charitable organizations.

We note that though through Caritas the church has been engaged in various socio-economic programmes, the organizers of this meeting expressed in their concept paper that the “time has come for the church to reaffirm the evangelical, spiritual, theological and ecclesial dimension of the charitable commitment of the entire people of God.”

This will only be possible through the involvement of the bishops who are the chief shepherd of their flock in their particular dioceses by making it a pastoral priority. It is in recognition of this fact that Pope Benedict XVI in his address to the bishops of France said “the church rests on the bishops and all her conducts follows the direction of the same rulers”. By this he implied that whatever happens in the diocese the bishop is accountable, for he is in charge. He can never delegate accountability and therefore Caritas is entirely under his care. It therefore follows that the bishop must guarantee proper management of the organization so that it does not go outside the evangelical mission of bringing about charity. Since they cannot do everything, the bishops have to put in place people who are competent not only in skills but also in spirituality for Caritas is not like any other NGO.

Caritas has a pastoral mission and that is why her activities should be included in the pastoral plan of the particular dioceses (for “faith without works is useless”). For this to be achieved, bishops have to ensure that they get the right persons to run the organization. They are to “make every effort to have the faithful actively support and promote works of evangelization and the apostolate.” In support of this endeavour, Pope Benedict said this to the bishops “do not waste your human and pastoral energies in the vain search for answers to your questions which are not of your direct competence” for there are many laity who can do it on their behalf. For the laity to be able to carry out this role they should be prepared in all spheres and as such “lay men and women with responsibility in the political, economic and social fields be equipped with a solid knowledge of the Catholic Social Teaching which can provide them with principles for acting in conformity with the Gospel.” This understanding is important because caritas is guided by the principles drawn from the CST. The bishops on their part have a role to “bring good news of salvation to all and to offer the faithful

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24 Concept note of the meeting with bishop presidents of Episcopal conferences and Caritas in Africa pg2
26 Christus Dominus, 1965 no 6
27 Africae Munus no 102
28 Ibid no128
catechesis which leads them to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ.” If they carry their duty well, then those entrusted with the running of the organization will bear witness to charity in truth and all people of God will get the necessary services. The lay faithful will acquire genuine awareness of their ecclesial mission and encourage them to engage in it with responsibility. None of their flock will be in want or go hungry. As they draw their pastoral plan, the bishops have to bear in mind that the work of charity has to be monitored and therefore have a chaplain who will always work hand in hand with those engaged in different fields.

Charity work which entails health work, education, and development programmes should never waver away from the gospel. Since the church has always had concern for the sick following the example of Jesus, the bishops have to ensure that “the health care institutions are managed in compliance with the ethical norms, providing services which conform to her teaching and are exclusively pro life. They must not become a source of enrichment for a few. The management of grant monies must aim at transparency and primarily serve the good of the sick.” By providing the best health service and at reasonable and affordable costs to the people of God and do it in the spirit of charity, diseases reduced, life will be saved, and living standards raised thus promoting justice in the world. They will be continuing the healing mission of our lord Jesus Christ who came to bring life and health to the suffering. For this to happen, the bishops have a great responsibility in their respective dioceses.

Education is a basic right for every person and therefore all people should access it if we have to attain integral development. It is for this that Pope Benedict XVI clearly stated that “Illiteracy represents one of the principle obstacles to development. It is a scourge on par with that of the pandemics. True it does not kill directly, but it contributes actively to marginalization of the person which is a form of social death and it blocks access to knowledge.” To do away with illiteracy bishops through Caritas have to guarantee existence of catholic schools “which are a precious resource for learning from childhood how to create bonds of peace and harmony in society since they train children in the African values that are taken up by those of the Gospel.” Pope Benedict on emphasizing the value of education added that “in order to make proper contribution to African society it is indispensable that students be taught the Church’s social teaching. This will help the church in Africa serenely to prepare a pastoral plan which speaks to the heart of Africans and enables them to be reconciled to them and by following Christ.” As a result there will be development which will not only enhance peace but will also promote love for all the people of God and this will be a sign of His presence in the world. The CST’s principles provide criteria for judgment and guidelines for action and if the catholic schools provide opportunities of teaching them then the

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29 Ibid 103
30 Africae munus no 141
31 Ibid no 76
32 Ibid, 134
33 Africae Munus No 137
society will have people who respect human dignity, have recourse for the poor, work in solidarity for the common good of all. They will realize too the value of forgiveness, reconciliation and love for all these will bring forth a just society.

As Caritas work to improve the living standard of the people, there is need to respect creation and ecosystem. The bishops have to help Caritas Africa to “speak in favour of an economy that cares for the poor and is resolutely opposed to an unjust order which under the pretext of reducing poverty has often helped to aggravate it”\textsuperscript{34}. In their advocacy work, caritas has to speak against the unjust order that prevent people from sharing from the many resources that the continent has and from consolidating their economies. This makes exploitation very lucrative because the economies of one country can not stand the market forces. They have to speak about mining policies, market policies, health policies, and the policies that protect the renewable and non renewable resources. The Pope noted that “some business men and women, governments and financial groups are involved in programs of exploitation which pollute the environment and cause unprecedented desertification. Serious danger is done to nature, to the forests, to flora and fauna and countless species risk extinction”\textsuperscript{35}. The bishops have a bigger responsibility than ever to come up with training programmes that form the people working for Caritas so that they realize the importance of being stewards of God’s creation.

To create a just order good governance is paramount. The bishops cannot turn a blind eye on this issue for it affects her people. For Pope Benedict XVI, “the body politic, whose essential duty is the implementation and administration of a just order, can be a major instrument at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace”\textsuperscript{36}. To achieve this, the bishops have to be instrumental through Caritas for they are engaged in activities that fight social injustices in the community. There is therefore need to engage with the governments of respective countries and work together to bring about justice and harmony in the continent. Many of the caritas organizations have been involved in advocacy work but it needs to be guided so that it brings about peace not conflicts. For this to happen, it should be noted that the bishops cannot work on their own without the support of the priests for they are the ones who have a direct contact with the people at the grassroots level and most of the people working with caritas have to be in touch with them.

\textbf{Role of priests in relation to Caritas Africa}

The priests are close and indispensable co-workers of the bishops and are charged with carrying out the work of evangelization which caters for the holistic development of the whole person. The priests have to remember that “Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the

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\textsuperscript{34} Africae Munus no 79  
\textsuperscript{35} Africae Munus no 80  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid no 81
\end{footnotesize}
principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity”\textsuperscript{37}. They are therefore to render service which protect and enhance the dignity of each person. As they do this they have to be aware of the different ideologies that confront the world today. Since they are at the grassroots level, they have to understand these theories that confuse the faithful, the implications that have on humanity and advise the Christians appropriately. They are called to build Christian communities by their example and to devote themselves to “those whom the lord entrusts to their formation in Christian virtues and their growth and holiness”\textsuperscript{38}. It is their duty to provide spiritual support to the Caritas organizations by bringing to them the good news of salvation, through provision of the sacrament of reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist “is the most effective means for building a reconciled, just and peaceful society”\textsuperscript{39} and therefore will nourish the caritas workers and those they serve. By guiding the lay faithful to partake in the body and blood of Christ, they will be able to treat all persons equally. It is the “table of the lord that gathers together men and women of different origins, cultures, races, languages and ethnic groups”\textsuperscript{40} and consequently all people will experience the love and joy of being children of God. Sharing in a meal signifies unity, love, reconciliation, justice and peace hence the Eucharist the spiritual meal if taken in the right disposition will yield those fruits.

The priests are also to encourage the faithful into the reading and meditating on the word of God for it is the one that “roots us more deeply in Christ and guides our service of reconciliation, justice and peace”\textsuperscript{41}. It is the word of God that brings conversion to the people and therefore the priest’s great responsibility is that of guiding people to true conversion. When they are converted, the work of charity will not be done like a duty but as a service following the footsteps of Jesus Christ who came not to be served but to serve. This will make those running the organizations move from money making venture to an evangelizing mission. This of course does not mean that they will not earn their just wage but that their basic aim is service of humanity.

The priests too are to be agents of reconciliation and are to help the African Societies heal the wounds of division and hatred. However, to be able to bring healing and reconciliation, they too should be healed. They have to provide opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation with the caritas personnel. It is this sacrament which “mends the broken bonds between individuals and God, and restores bonds with the society. It also trains our hearts and our spirits to live in unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart and humble mind”\textsuperscript{42}. To enhance unity among the faithful, the priests have to transcend the social, economic and political interests.

\textsuperscript{37} Caritas in veritate no 1  
\textsuperscript{38} Africæ Munus no 109  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid no 152  
\textsuperscript{40} No 152  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid 150  
\textsuperscript{42} Africæ Munus no 155, cf 1 Pe:3: 8
Unfortunately in the midst of negative ethnicity, they also find themselves becoming partisan and to some extent this brings division and conflicts among the faithful which sends a wrong message to the lay faithful who look upon the priests for guidance and direction. They have to be guided by the Gospel in whatever they do.

Priests have to guarantee that transformation is central in the formation programmes in order to have leaders who will enforce and create structures that respect and promote human dignity of all. This has to be done with the understanding that, the lay faithful “lives in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life from which the very fabric of their existence is woven. They are persons who live an ordinary life in the world: they study, they work, they form relationships as friends, professionals, members of society, cultures, etc. If the laity are well formed, they will be able to evangelize wherever they will be. To achieve this aim, certain virtues, which in human affairs are deservedly esteemed, contribute a great deal: such as goodness of heart, sincerity, strength and constancy of mind, zealous pursuit of justice, affability, and others”\textsuperscript{43}. This will only be possible if the priest carry out their roles responsibly.

**Role of the laity in relation to caritas**

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. To enable them to properly take up their role, Pope Benedict XVI said that it was fitting for the church in Africa to have “centres of biblical, spiritual, liturgical and pastoral formation organized in the diocese”\textsuperscript{44}. This will empower them “give a glad, generous, and prompt response to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and to the voice of Christ, who is giving them an especially urgent invitation at this moment”\textsuperscript{45} to earnestly serve the church. Since they cannot “relinquish their participation in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote the common good”\textsuperscript{46} in the society, they have to be fully formed to take these roles as a way of evangelizing the society and bringing liberty to the oppressed. They have to remember that their mission is to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility\textsuperscript{47}. Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains

\textsuperscript{43} Presbyterorum Ordinis 1965,no 3

\textsuperscript{44} Africae Munus no 128

\textsuperscript{45} Christifidelis laici no2

\textsuperscript{46} John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici (30 December 1988), 42:

“true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as social charity.”

From the afore mentioned, it is already evident that the laity have a bigger responsibility to play in bringing order in the society for they are experts in different fields. It is in acknowledging this that Pope Benedict XVI said: “Bearing witness to Christ by showing through example that work can be a very positive setting for personal development and not by means of making profit,” is the distinctive feature of Christian professional’s life. Since they have been given the mandate to run different charity organization by the church’s authority, they should take this as a chance to exercise their evangelizing role. Through their faithful service, they proclaim the kingdom of God. They are to make sure that they embrace the church social teaching in their daily work and promote a just and peaceful society. The finances that are provided for specific charitable activities are to be used for the same. Unfortunately some of them take advantage of these resources and since they know they are competent, they can always manipulate the bishops or the clergy and confuse them such that they do not discover the areas of weakness. In many instances it is the laity who run hospitals, schools, development projects, business ventures on behalf of the church leadership but in some instances, they use these as their own. Instead of giving the right services, they first enrich themselves which already promotes conflict instead of bringing about peace.

Reflecting on the objectives of Caritas today
Caritas aims at stimulating and aiding national Caritas organizations to participate, by means of active charity, in the assistance, advancement, and integral development of the most underprivileged members of the society within an overall pastoral programme. To meet this objective, bishops have to look out for ways of engaging their flock constructively and in ways that promote the dignity of human person, peaceful coexistence and solidarity.

To reduce poverty, the bishops have to plan on how to mobilize people to be critical consumers because some of the poverty that we have are structurally sustained by consumption patterns both locally and internationally. It is in line of this that the Pope in Caritas in Veritate stated that “Global interconnectedness has led to the emergence of a new political power, that of consumers and their associations.” For him this is a phenomenon that needs to be further explored, “…as it contains positive elements to be encouraged as well as excesses to be avoided” and this should constitute a critical role of the African bishops. Africa is known to consume what it does not produce and produce what it does not consume. The bishops ought to be active participants in

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48 Deus Caritas est no 29
49 Africae Munus no 130
50 Caritas in veritate no 66
challenging this trend that has helped maintain Africa in poverty. They have to encourage the people to consume what they produce locally. They will achieve this through caritas organizations that have a lot of interest in food security and sustainable livelihoods.

It is in light of this that Pope Benedict XVI, cautioned people to realize that “purchasing is always a moral — and not simply economic — act. Hence the consumer has a specific social responsibility, which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise. Consumers should be continually educated regarding their daily role, which can be exercised with respect for moral principles without diminishing the intrinsic economic rationality of the act of purchasing”\textsuperscript{51}. Bishops could help in this education of the masses. How much local production is exported so as to buy sometimes cheaper or poor quality items? In Africa we still have localities where mothers sell off eggs to purchase bread or nutritious products from their plantations to purchase food. Coffee growers who consume cocoa or milo etc! These patterns are adverse to sustainable development and the environment.

The aggression by agribusiness companies into the African small holder farmers is something only the Bishops can stand up to. The onslaught consists in creating dependency on purchased seed, inorganic fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides usually produced by related or conglomerate multinationals. The immediate benefits of conventional agriculture are very attractive yet the cost to the environment is irreversible and costs Africans their food sovereignty. This state of affairs raises social justice questions. But the Bishops must be able to give people an alternative. Caritas ought to step up its investment in agro-ecology, help people establish farmers markets that are organic. Help with certification of fields for organic status so that products can compete locally and internationally. Hence the consumer has a specific social responsibility, which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise. Consumers should be continually educated regarding their daily role, which can be exercised with respect for moral principles without diminishing the intrinsic economic rationality of the act of purchasing.

Another attribute of charity to the other relates to ethical investment. Finance, according to Benedict XVI must be an “instrument directed towards improved wealth creation and development”\textsuperscript{52}. Being instruments, he maintains that the entire economy and finance, must be used in an ethical way so as to create suitable conditions for human development and for the development of peoples. Having said this, the questions posed are: where are bishops investing their monies, which mutual funds they are collaborating with to grow their assets, how are these banks and mutual funds investing the monies that they are getting? If caritas has a stake in the development offices of many dioceses in Africa, then caritas has a stake in how these moneys are

\textsuperscript{51} Caritas in veritate no 66
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid no 65
grown and spent, how they loan to the poor. **Assuming that caritas is funding diocese x, and diocese x banks with bank y, yet bank y rents to poor people at exorbitant rates, then diocese x, bank y and caritas are involved in unethical investment.**

Caritas Internationalis President Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez has cited Pope John Paul II’s new system based on solidarity against a system of values that has competition as its backbone. Caritas Internationalis, he says has “the responsibility to be the hands and heart of God in many parts of the world, especially among the most disadvantaged. Some of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged are the unborn children hence Caritas should never lose sight of this. **Respect for life should be given priority by Caritas** for the first way to globalize solidarity is to globalize respect for life and, indeed, every life. For the Catholic church, the “position on the matter of abortion is unambiguous. The child in his or her mother’s womb is a human life which must be protected from conception to natural death”. If Caritas does not put its efforts in the work of protecting lives of the unborn and vulnerable persons, it will be missing in its charity.

It is sad to note that the greatest threats to human life are now packaged in international instruments like the Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women, The Maputo protocol on the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and the various local legislations to that effect. Human life international (HLI) refers to Maputo Protocol “as a clear and present danger” and for them it is the ideal instrument to legalize abortion all over Africa. The article puts it plainly that “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to protect the reproductive rights of women by authorizing medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus.”

For Pope Benedict “some non-governmental Organizations work actively to spread abortion, at times promoting the practice of sterilization in poor countries, in some cases not even informing the women concerned. Moreover, there is reason to suspect that development aid is sometimes linked to specific health-care policies which de facto involve the imposition of strong birth control measures.”

Protection of life of the unborn babies has and is still a big challenge to the church from different individuals and association but “we must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any demise or ambiguity which might conform us to thinking of this world”55. These anti-life positions continue to persist because pro-life values have not been trumpeted as much as they should locally and internationally. The Bishops through Caritas ought to invest more in the Family life offices. Natural family planning has not been as well researched and hyped as it should.

This approach is known to draw couples together, increase communication and strengthen families. Therefore

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53 Protocol to the African charter on human and peoples’ rights on the rights of women in Africa. It is worthy pointing out mental and physical health can be interpreted differently to suit the person involved.

54 Caritas in Veritate no 28

55 Africae munus no 71
Conclusion
Caritas Africa has been instrumental in supporting the poor but they have to continue with this mission because there is no time when humanity will have had enough charity. The bishops have to make it part of the diocesan pastoral programme and appoint people who are willing to serve all indiscriminately. To accomplish their work, Caritas has to engage in studies and researches that are able to bring out the problems arising from poverty in the world, investigate the causes, and propose solutions in accordance with justice and the dignity of the human person. They need to involve catholic institutions of higher learning who have competencies in these fields and come up with practical ways of arresting the challenges facing humanity in different parts of Africa. It is a consorted effort which should not be left to one player but all the members of the church.

It is worth mentioning that despite the engagement by the members of the church in charity, there are still eminent challenges that have to be addressed so that the mission of Caritas is accomplished. The bishops need to address the issue of personnel, funding and formation programmes for Caritas workers. They have to remember that it is their mandate to provide proper formation of the personnel by providing ongoing spiritual formation. It is not enough to employ professionals, there is need to have informed, formed and transformed people who can bring the gospel message of love to all the poor for thy do not only deal with material poverty but spiritual poverty too.

In an effort to get funding, the church in Africa should not be carried away from their evangelizing mission because of the conditions attached to the funding. Africa is enormously rich with resources, and if well channeled, we will not need to depend on foreign aid and support. The bishops have to hold their governments accountable for the proper distribution of resources so that poverty can be reduced or eradicated. They have also to be exemplary in their particular dioceses so that they can have the moral authority to challenge the evils in the society.