THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN FADA N'GOURMA DIOCESE, BURKINA FASO: A STUDY ON HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE LIGHT OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING[1]

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Abstract. This study explores the experiences of the Internally Displaced Persons in the Diocese of Fada N'Gourma in Burkina Faso amid terrorism. It uses the See-Judge-Act method of Catholic Social Teaching to investigate the challenges to IDPs' dignity. The observations reveal an IDP population victimized by discrimination and neglect within the host communities, emphasizing the moral imperative to uphold dignity. The research contributes to theological reflection on displacement and dignity while highlighting the Church's unique faith-based humanitarian assistance, free from proselytism and political agendas despite the structural and practical limitations and difficulties.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), terrorism, dignity, rights, Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Introduction

Prior to 2015, Burkina Faso had not experienced the phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). IDPs are defined as "persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular

1 GenAI Disclosure Statement: This paper used Grammarly to correct the spelling of words and check the structure and clarity of sentences.

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due to or to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed internationally recognized borders."[2] Since then, extremist Islamic groups—*Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam wal-Muslimeen* (JNIM), affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), affiliated with ISIS—have claimed responsibility for numerous attacks across the country. These violent incidents have generated widespread fear among the population and have led to the depopulation of villages and towns, resulting in a significant loss of human capital. According to official data published by the *Conseil National de Secours d'Urgence et de Réhabilitation* (CONASUR), as of March 31, 2023, the total number of IDPs nationwide had reached 2,062,534.

The Diocese of Fada N'Gourma is among the regions most severely affected by the IDP crisis. According to data collected by the *Organisation Catholique pour le Développement et la Solidarité Caritas Burkina Faso, Secretariat Exécutif Diocesain* (OCADES/Caritas/SED) of Fada N'Gourma, the number of IDPs in the diocese had reached 219,719 as of March 2025. The visible plight of the IDPs has drawn the attention of various state, private, secular, and faith-based humanitarian organizations, prompting efforts to provide immediate relief. Addressing the needs of IDPs necessarily includes the provision of basic human necessities. However, such responses must go beyond the temporary emergency assistance. A more comprehensive approach is required, since "human rights show our respect

2 UNHCR, "The UN Refugee Agency, Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons," https://www.unhcr.org/media/guiding-principles-internal-displacement (accessed March 23, 2025).

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for the dignity of the human person as an agent, not just as the passive recipient of others' agency-as a means to their end."[3]

This paper examines the lived experiences and challenges that reflect the violation and neglect of the dignity of IDPs within host communities, focusing on the specific context of the Diocese of Fada N'Gourma. Employing the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), further proposes practical actions and strategies aimed at safeguarding their dignity and rights, while fostering their active participation in social life.

The Internally Displaced Persons' Struggles and Difficulties

Living Conditions of the Internally Displaced Persons

"We have all become beggars, day after day." "I cannot feed my family. I am ashamed of myself." "As IDPs, we have reduced our food rations." "We have borrowed lodging, and on top of that, we have become beggars." "We no longer have dignity because every day we beg for food." These statements reflect the poignant testimonies and heartfelt appeals from the IDPs. Food insecurity remains a more pronounced reality among the IDPs. The influx of IDPs has placed significant pressure on the already limited food resources of host communities, with IDPs bearing the brunt of this scarcity due to their heightened vulnerability. In fleeing violence, many were forced to abandon essential means of livelihood, including millet stores, cooking utensils, farming tools, livestock, and clothing, in order to either seek refuge or join their current community. The necessity of begging for food—for themselves and their families—constitutes one of the most distressing aspects of their experience and represents a profound violation of their

3 William O'Neil, *Catholic Social Teaching: A User's Guide* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 25.

human dignity. Moreover, adjusting to urban or semi-urban life presents additional challenges. Their reduced food intake is not the result of voluntary discipline, such as dieting or fasting, but rather of sheer necessity due to lack of access. At the same time, some IDPs demonstrate a capacity for self-reflection, drawing lessons from their displacement and expressing a renewed sense of gratitude. They have come to value aspects of well-being that were previously taken for granted in their home villages. Nevertheless, experiences of inequality persist. One displaced mother recounted her difficulty in accessing water, noting that residents in the surrounding neighborhood do not face the same challenge—an indication of the injustice and discrimination to which IDPs are often subjected.

Access to adequate housing is not a matter of luxury but a basic necessity. For individuals seeking safety, having a roof over one's head is a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, a significant number of IDPs still lack proper housing. Many families now experience overcrowded living conditions, with all members sharing a single room. As one head of an IDP household assisted by *Caritas* reports, "We sleep with our mothers, wives, and children in the same room." In a cultural context where, by the age of eighteen, young men are initiated into adulthood and are expected to build their own homes, such conditions can be both traumatizing and deeply humiliating. Current data indicate that 46% of IDP households reside with host families, 51% live in rented accommodations, and 3% stay in makeshift tents. IDPs who have no relatives in the host communities are forced to rent despite significant financial constraints. In some cases, landlords exploit this vulnerability by increasing rental fees, further exacerbating the precarious living conditions of displaced families.

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Challenges and Struggles

Economic Difficulties

In the context of forced displacement, IDPs often become entirely dependent on government assistance, humanitarian agencies, and the charity of host communities. However, the increasing number of IDPs at both the national and diocesan levels does not allow them to provide adequate assistance to all. Government resources remain limited, and host families are increasingly overwhelmed. As a result, securing the means to rebuild lost livelihoods has become a significant challenge for the IDPs in Fada. Temporary settlements and housing insecurity hinder opportunities for long-term enterprise to achieve eventual economic stability. Consequently, many IDPs remain at a survival level. One of them declared, "I was a merchant. The jihadists broke into my store and collected all my merchandise. I fled, leaving behind my house, food, and animals." In order to survive, many are compelled to accept any available work, often in fields for which they have no prior experience or preparation. More importantly, access to stable employment remains limited. One mother confided that since they arrived at her host community, her husband had left for the gold mining site and has not returned, leaving her to care for their children alone.

The appalling issue of internal displacement due to terrorism in the *Gulmu* particularly affects women and girls. Women and children represent 80% of the IDP population, with many being widows and orphans. Economic desperation and the lack of other viable alternatives forcibly lead women and girls to prostitution as a means of survival. They are compelled to provide food for their children and younger siblings, support their education, and meet basic expenses such as rent. Phrases like "We are forced to do work that we do not want" the extent

to which circumstances—and, at times, individuals—coerce them into degrading and exploitative practices. This statement also reflects the difficulty female IDPs face in articulating the full extent of their suffering. The host community members have observed and confirmed the prevalence of prostitution among displaced women and young girls. Even prior to the current displacement crisis, such practices were present in the *Gulmu Region*, especially in localities around the mining sites. However, displacement has exacerbated women's vulnerability, rendering them even more susceptible to exploitation and prostitution.

Scholarly studies support these observations. Diana Therese M. Veloso, in *Gender-Based Violence in (Post) Conflict Zones: The Experiences of the Internally Displaced People from Zamboanga City*, demonstrates how broader social conditions shape the specific experiences of gender-based violence—both private and public— encountered by IDP women as they move through temporary settlements and transitional housing.[4] Sadly, in this context, displaced women—especially widows, single mothers, and young orphaned girls, some below the age of eighteen—often become targets of exploitation by men who take advantage of their precarious situation.

Difficulties for Social Integration

For individuals who have fled their homes to save their lives, social integration is crucial for rebuilding a new life. Displacement entails not only the loss of material possessions but also profound disruptions to family structures, including

4 Diana Therese M. Veloso, "Gender-Based Violence in (Post) Conflict Zones: The Experiences of the Internally Displaced People from Zamboanga City," in *Displacement and Disqualification: Asian Feminist Theological Perspectives*, ed. Mary Mee-Yin Yuen and Regina Wentzel Wolfe (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc, 2022), 119.

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family dislocation. In the chaos of fleeing terrorist brutality, many families become separated, and members often lose contact with one another. Some remain unaware of the whereabouts of their siblings, parents, or relatives. Unfortunately, in the case of IDPs in Fada N'Gourma, integration into host communities is not always easy. Many continue to struggle for full acceptance. While they depend on the support of host communities, they also struggle to trust people around them. This lack of trust is mutual, affecting both IDPs and host populations and shaping their daily interactions. To express his experience, one displaced individual said, "We have been through a lot. Seven months after our arrival, our neighbor closed his latrine to us—something I could never have imagined."

The economic burdens resulting from the unexpected influx of IDPs into communities have intensified competition over work opportunities, basic necessities such as food, and even natural resources like water. Local infrastructures, including schools and hospitals, have become overcrowded, further exacerbating tensions between IDPs and hosts. Prior ethnic tensions in the *Gulmu* region, combined with ongoing security concerns and competition for resources, have contributed to the social stigmatization of certain groups of IDPs, especially those belonging to the Fulani ethnic group. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of the root causes of terrorism, the Fulani group is often suspected of being associated with the terrorist armed group. This makes the integration of innocent Fulani IDPs difficult, despite the government efforts to end ethnic discrimination. The government has taken steps to address these issues, including conducting investigations and arresting individuals who are propagating hatred against particular ethnic or religious groups on social media.

Psycho-Spiritual Struggles

The circumstances leading to the displacement are deeply traumatic. The methods used by the terrorists leave lasting psychological scars on survivors. Although many have escaped the violence that devastated their villages, they continue to carry within themselves the profound impact of witnessing such atrocities, as well as the persistent fear of being killed. These past traumatic experiences remain present in their daily lives, contributing to ongoing emotional struggles and psychological stress. While images of terrorist attacks reported in the media can evoke strong reactions, internally displaced persons are direct witnesses to such violence and often attribute their survival to divine miracle. Many recount having to step over the dead bodies of parents, siblings, or friends whom they were forced to leave behind without proper burial. One displaced individual reported losing six members of his family. Such experiences have a profound and lasting impact on their mental health.

Uncertainty can be the biggest problem for IDPs who are dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the hardships that they endured before and/or during the process of their flight to the host community.[5] The causes of the psychological problems of the IDPs are not simply due to a single event or a sequence of catastrophic terrorist attacks that drove them from home. It is a situation embedded with threat, uncertainty, deprivation, oppression, and suffering.[6]

5 Sander Kramer, "Getting Closer: Methods of Research with Refugees and Asylum Seekers," in *Forced Migration and Mental Health: Rethinking the care of Refugees and Displaced Persons*, edited by David Ingleby, (Boston: Springer US, 2025), 129, https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/b99490.

6 David Ingleby, ed., *Forced Migration and Mental Health, Rethinking the care of Refugees and Displaced Persons*, (Boston: Springer US, 2025), 11.

When will I return to the place I once called home? This question resonates with all the displaced persons. In the context of conflict-induced displacement, Horst maintains two sources of uncertainty: imperfect knowledge and the unpredictability of the future.[7] This is true for our IDP population. The lack of perfect understanding of what happened in the past and what is happening, the speed at which their lives have been dramatically affected, and the lack of control over their life choices[8] create a sense of unpredictability within themselves, which can affect their psychological health. There is uncertainty about what to eat or drink. Moreover, there is uncertainty about safety.

The lament questions such as "what have we done to deserve this?" "Lord, why did you allow the terrorists to attack us?" or "Lord, are you not the father of orphans and defender of widows? How long will you take to save us?" The IDPs cry to God not because they do not believe, but rather their belief itself is shaken. They do not pretend to force God's hand but humbly entrust themselves to the One they love and trust.

Catholic Social Teaching on Human Dignity

Life and Dignity of the Human Person: Ontological Dignity

Dignity at its most constitutive level arises from one's very existence. Early CST connects human dignity with the soul

7 Cindy Horst and Katarzyna Grabska, "Flight and Exile: Uncertainty in the Context of Conflict-Induced Displacement," *Social Analysis* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 4, https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590101.

8 Horst and Grabska, "Flight and Exile," 5.

created in the image and likeness of God.[9] Sacred Scriptures affirm that "God created humans in his image, in the image of God, he created them"(Gen 1:27). This is the foundation of dignity. Among all other species of creation, God crowned humanity with glory and honor (cf. Ps 8:4-5). The *imago Dei* confers ontological dignity on every single human being. It is that dimension of human dignity that "belongs to the person as such simply because he or she exists and is willed, created, and loved by God."[10] But what does it mean to be created in the image of God? The Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith substantially answers: "To be created in the image of God means to possess a sacred value that transcends every distinction of sexual, social, political, cultural, and religious nature."[11] John XXIII argues that God is the only real source of justice, truth, and love, as he says, "let men make all the technical and economic progress they can, there will be no peace nor justice in the world until they return to a sense of their dignity as creatures and sons of God."[12] Human beings can flourish to their full potential only within a family, a community, or society; as the saying goes, no one is an island. *Ubuntu* (African Philosophy of humanness) affirms that all humans possess equal dignity by virtue of their capacity for communal relationships. Even those who misuse this capacity through immoral actions retain the ability to

9 Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter Rerum Novarum: On Capital and Labor*, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/l13rerum.htm, no. 40.

10 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dignitas Infinita on Human Dignity 2024*, Documents, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html, no.7.

11 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 11.

12 Pope John XXIII, *Encyclical Letter, Mater et Magistra, On Christianity and Social Progress*, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/john23/j23mater.htm, no. 215.

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act otherwise; thus, they do not lose their inherent dignity.[13] Human dignity rests, above all, on the fact that humanity is called to communion with God, who created them out of love and for love.[14]

Though the tragedy of sin in human history has cast a shadow on human dignity, affecting their capacity to remain in communion with God, the neighbor, and the rest of creation, Jesus elevated human dignity through the incarnation and redemption, for believers and for the entire human race.[15] God raised human beings to a greater dignity. They are ransomed by the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7) and made children and heirs of God through grace in the Holy Spirit (Rom 8: 16-17). The goal of Hasan Musa's presentation on *Learning to Speak Human Rights as Human Dignity in Nigeria: Towards a Trinitarian Theological Reflection* was really to show that "the Trinitarian encounter surely opens us to God's miracle of transforming the world in which we live, through the presence and action of a new community, namely the Church."[16]

Applied to the situation of the IDPs, ontological dignity remains intrinsic, universal, and non-negotiable, even in the context of internal displacement caused by terrorism. It is indelible and endures regardless of circumstances.[17] God fearfully and wonderfully knitted every person (cf. Ps 139: 13-14), giving them dignity beyond any social, economic, or political

13 Thaddeus Metz, "*Ubuntu* as a Moral Theory and Human Rights in South Africa," *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 11, no.2 (2011): 544, https://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/metz-t.

14 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), no. 19.

15 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

16 Hasan Musa, *Learning to Speak Human Rights as Human Dignity in Nigeria: Towards a Trinitarian Theological Reflection*, 11.

17 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no.7.

status. Every IDP uprooted by terrorism in Burkina maintains their sacred value. Amid the suffering of IDPs—manifested in hunger and inadequate shelter—the image of a loving God continues to shine forth. The salvific merits of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, transcending time and space, embrace them in their plight. In serving IDPs, the Church serves Christ Himself. The recognition of human dignity thus becomes the foundation of genuine humility, love, and justice.[18]

Economic and Human Development: Social Dignity

The ontological aspect provides the basis for the manifestation of dignity in social conditions and relations, shaping how individuals are recognized in society. *Dignitas Infinita* defines social dignity as "the quality of a person's living conditions."[19] Similarly, *Rerum Novarum* addresses the living conditions of the working class, calling upon civil authorities to intervene whenever employers degrade their workers "with conditions repugnant to their dignity as human beings."[20] This principle is directly applicable to IDPs seeking employment to support their families. Beyond being direct victims of violent and inhumane attacks, they also suffer from the consequences of structural injustice, including selfishness, shortsightedness, misguided political decisions, and imprudent economic policies. These conditions reflect a world marked by structures of sin, in which neo-imperialism and exploitation prevail over interdependence and solidarity.[21]

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18 Albert Nolan, *Hope in an Age of Despair* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 106-107.

19 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 8.

20 Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, no. 36.

21 Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Solicitudo Rei Socialis: On Social Concerns*, December 30, 1987, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, no. 36.

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Limited access to basic needs and services offends human dignity. Homelessness or inadequate housing constitutes a serious assault on human dignity and limits IDPs' opportunities to realize their fundamental human rights and responsibility of building God's kingdom on earth. Overcrowded living conditions and inadequate shelters fall short of what is required for a dignified human life. Having lost their livestock and sources of livelihood, many IDPs are now compelled to beg for food—an outcome contrary to the Creator's intention for human flourishing. Similarly, the lack of access to adequate healthcare services represents a further violation of their dignity. Moreover, reliance on host families and humanitarian assistance often renders IDPs voiceless, excluding them from decision-making processes, even in matters that directly affect their own future. Such exclusion deepens their social marginalization. Social dignity, therefore, cannot be reduced solely to economic conditions but must also include participation, recognition, and agency.

Development programs for the IDPs should not and cannot be limited to economic growth alone. To be authentic, development must be complete and integral. It must promote the good of each person and the whole person.[22] IDPs' spiritual, social, and cultural development should not be neglected nor left underdeveloped. Excessive economic inequality among persons undermines social justice, equity, dignity, and peace.[23] Economic development is the new name of peace.[24] But this development, synonymous with peace, is possible only if

22 Pope Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter, Populorum Progressio*, March 26, 1967, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html no. 14.

23 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29.

24 Pope Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter, Populorum Progressio*, no.76.

society adopts the common good of all as its norm rather than individual greed.[25] From this perspective, Pope Francis recasts the concept of dignity in terms of universal fraternity and social friendship, two inseparable and equally vital poles in every society."[26] The IDPs deserve special care and friendship within the society. God himself reminds the Israelite community of them being displaced in Egypt and commands that the stranger living among them be treated and loved equally as their native-born (Lev. 19:33-34). God loves the foreigners and provides for their basic physical needs (Deut. 10:18-19). God's providential care is realized through the community, which must hide and be a shelter for the fugitives and displaced persons (Is. 16:3-4). God's own concern for the IDPs reminds the Church that solidarity is an integral part of discipleship to Christ who identified himself with the stranger and the displaced (cf. Mt. 25:35-40).

Participation in the Common Good: Moral Dignity

Social recognition of fundamental dignity is essential, but it is not enough on its own. Dignity also has a moral dimension, which calls IDPs to act in ways that respect both themselves and others. The dignity of the human person involves the right to active participation in public affairs and in contributing to the common good of society.[27] Jeremiah exhorts displaced persons to seek the peace and prosperity of their host communities actively. Scripture gives a good example of a displaced

25 Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no.10.

26 Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter, Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, October 3, 2020, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, no. 142,

27 Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html, no.26.

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person who actively made a living with dignity (cf Jr. 29:7). Ruth, a displaced woman, worked in the field to provide for her family rather than just waiting for alms (Rt 2:7). According to *Gaudium et Spes*, "the common good is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as individuals or as groups, to reach their fulfillment more easily and more fully."[28] Suzanne Mulligan observes that the Council's definition is a positive statement that does not limit "the common good to minimal conditions necessary for subsistence, but points to an understanding of the human person that is vibrant and full of possibility."[29] Within this framework, work emerges as the primary means by which a person attains social dignity, as well as economic and human development. Indeed, a person's "life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity."[30]

The IDPs' struggle for economic integration reveals various obstacles to their participation in the economy and to fulfilling their vocation to continue the work of creation (Gen 1: 28-29). The inability to fulfill their ethical responsibility vis-à-vis their families and the community harms parents' moral conscience. Relying on humanitarian assistance, they are not autonomous and free to lead their lives as they would. IDPs, especially women and children, are exposed to coercion and exploitation. When IDP women and girls turn to prostitution as their way of survival, they are acting in a way that is "undignified."

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28 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no.26.

29 Suzanne Mulligan, *Dwelling with Dignity: Catholic Social Teaching and Homelessness* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2025), 44.

30 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, September 14, 1981, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html, no. 1.

Option for the Poor: Existential Dignity

Ultimately, dignity extends beyond ethical obligations. In the context of displacement—where the human worth of IDPs is severely tested—the existential dimension of dignity becomes especially significant. Existential dignity refers to a person's lived experience of dignity. It is the type of "dignity implied in the ever-increasing discussion about a 'dignified' life and one that is 'not dignified.'"[31] One of the most cherished and defining principles in Catholic social thought to address the existential dignity of the IDPs is the "option for the poor." The "poor" here refers not only to the economically destitute but also to all those who have lost meaning in life. While the slogan "preferential option for the poor" originated and gained popularity through the Latin American Liberation Theology, it is deeply rooted in the Scriptures and in the Church's longstanding social commitment. For a credible imitation of Christ, the Church's tradition has borne and continues to bear witness to an "option or love of preference for the poor, a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity that embraces the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care, and above all, those without hope for a better future."[32] The option for the poor in the context of internal displacement restores the IDPs' existential dignity by prioritizing their needs and rights in every aspect of their lives. The justice of a civilized—that is, well-ordered— society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members and attends to their needs. God's preferential option for the poor, aimed at establishing a kingdom of justice, fraternity, and solidarity through concrete, compassionate actions, serves as

31 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 8.

32 Pope John Paul II, *Solicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 42.

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the foundation of the Church's commitment to the poor.[33] It calls for both a deep sense of compassion and tangible expressions of solidarity with displaced and marginalized persons. Accordingly, CST exhorts the faithful to prioritize the needs of the IDPs because "when there is a question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim of special attention."[34]

Stripped of their sense of belonging, the IDPs, day by day, feel their dignity crumbling. It is not a surprise that people who have been exposed to violence and trauma feel stripped of their own humanity. Psychological and emotional factors affect their sense of self-worth. Their perception of ontological dignity is blunted by the hardships of their undignified living conditions and difficulties of fulfilling their ethical obligations toward the self, family, and society. Consequently, trauma, neglect, exclusion, and discrimination wound the existential dignity. Psalm 38:18 comforts and assures all those who are heavily burdened and losing all purpose in life that "the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." The life and ministry of Jesus is a testimony of how God "has dynamically engaged and critically addressed all the existential issues of humanity."[35]

Contemporary authors enrich the reflection on dignity and the corollary principles. Åsbjørn Melkevik and Bjarne Melkevik identify four theories of dignity based "on value,

33 Pope Leo XIV, *Apostolic Exhortation, Dilexi Te: On the Love for the Poor*, October 4, 2025, Apostolic Exhortations, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html, no. 16.

34 Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, no. 37.

35 Hasan Musa, "On Learning to Speak Human Rights as Human Dignity in Nigeria: Towards a Trinitarian Theological Reflection," *BTSK Insight* 19, no. 1 (October 2023): 11-12.

honor, agency and welfare."[36] The value theory teaches that every human being has intrinsic and non-negotiable worth. The honor theory of dignity, though it initially referred to those in high ranking, argues that dignity is above any price and cannot be traded for any material good. The agency theory stipulates that, based on their capacity for free will, people possess dignity. In Kantian thought, "all rational beings stand under the law that each of them is to treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves."[37] According to the welfare theory, dignity belongs equally to all human beings. Therefore, dignity is the foundation of the states' causal, moral, and remedial responsibilities towards forcibly displaced persons.[38] Regardless of the circumstances, "people must be able to develop their capacity to act on reason and on the basis of prudence or efficiency and their capacity to develop their own goals."[39] David Guretski rightly highlights that "dignity is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace."[40] The Church works for justice to enable the human capabilities of the IDPs. In his first encyclical, Pope Leo

36 Åsbjørn Melkevik and Bjarne Melkevik, "Two Concepts of Dignity: On the Decay of Agency in Law," in *The Inherence of Human Dignity: Foundations of Human Dignity*, Volume 1, edited by Angus J. L. Menuge and Barry W. Bussey (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021), Ebook Central, 138,

37 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 41.

38 Megan Bradley, *Refugee Repatriation: Justice, Responsibility and Redress* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), Ebook Central, 29.

39 Åsbjørn Melkevik and Bjarne Melkevik, "Two Concepts of Dignity," 143.

40 David Guretzki, "May Critics of 'Inherent Dignity' Be Answered? Rejoinders From Christian Anthropology," in *The Inherence of Human Dignity: Foundations of Human Dignity*, Volume 1, edited by Angus J. L. Menuge and Barry W. Bussey (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2021), Ebook Central, 165.

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points to IDP individuals and communities among the most vulnerable that social justice requires to pay more attention. Justice for the IDPs "is not merely about the fairer distribution of resources or the correction of current injustices, but also assumes a restorative dimension. It aims to mend their broken bonds and their reintegration."[41]

Responses and Strategies

Presence and Accompaniment: The Church's witness of Christ's presence to the IDPs

In an article, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) draws on its experience of mission among the refugees and IDPs in Africa and Asia to share the values of accompaniment. The ministry of accompaniment offers companionship, active listening, and solidarity, with a focus on individual needs and concerns. Accompaniment, JRS fundamentally believes, is a process that echoes divine presence in the lives of the IDPs.[42] The primary aim of Catholic pastoral care for refugees is to nurture their inner well-being so that they can regain a sense of meaning in life. Through the pastoral care of physical presence and accompaniment, she carries out the priestly office of spiritual guide. In the context of the IDPs in Fada N'Gourma, this pastoral care becomes more complex, given the religiously pluralist composition of the population. How can the Church fulfill the Lord's mandate to go and make disciples of all nations (Mth 28: 19 – 20) while responding to the needs of an IDP population from

41 Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, May 15, 2026, Encyclical Letter, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html, nos.78 & 79.

42 Joe Hampson SJ, Thomas M Crea, Rocío Calvo, and Francisco Álvarez SJ, "The Values of Accompaniment," *Forced Migration Review* 48 (November 2014): 7-8, https://www.fmreview.org/faith/hampson-crea-calvo-alvarez/.

various religious backgrounds? The internal displacement calls the Church in Fada N'Gourma to reflect on its mission of evangelization. On one hand, the mission of the Church is the explicit proclamation of the Gospel message; on the other hand, it includes living out the faith authentically. The most effective way of ministering to the IDPs would be through Christian witness. The resurrected Jesus, before ascending to the Father, also promised his disciples, they will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon them, and they will be his witnesses... to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8). How the Church as an institution and a people of God can make visible the reality of Christ to the IDPs while respecting their freedom of religion? The truth of Jesus is that he treated every human person he encountered with respect and dignity.

The first action is for the Church to be physically present with the IDPs. Every individual IDP thirsts to be welcomed, recognized, and acknowledged as a person. Being in solidarity with the IDPs is an opportunity to offer them the Good News of the Gospel, not to convert them to the Catholic Church, but simply in line with how Jesus himself perceived his own mission: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4: 18 - 19). Being present with the IDPs even without words is in itself a witness to Christ who walked among his people, sharing their suffering and freeing them from undignified conditions.

In practical terms, this may involve religious communities and priests, and members of the Catholic community organizing regular visits to IDPs' families or local families hosting IDPs. In such times of suffering and uncertainty, the

presence of priests and religious men and women can be a source of encouragement and a sense of belonging for the IDPs when they feel seen and not forgotten. The religious congregations can make it part of their own community apostolate on behalf of the Church. Nevertheless, the witness will have a significant impact if the parish priests organize the visits. One can envision a group composed of a priest, religious man and woman, catechist, and other lay persons visiting an IDP's family. Regardless of the family's religious beliefs, the group of visitors goes there to be with them and makes them feel part of the community. It is an apostolate of loving presence that every human person going through difficult times needs. All parishes in the Diocese are rich in Catholic Action. Movements such as *Mouvement Eucharistique des Jeunes* (Eucharistic Youth Movement), *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique* (Catholic Working Youth), and the Association of Catholic Women, to name a few, are very dynamic and could help carry out the Church's mission of offering a consoling presence to the IDPs. Of course, each Catholic Action movement already has its specific vocation in the Church and elaborates its activities in accordance with its objective. But every movement, group, or association can include visits to the IDPs as part of its activities. To make the kingdom of God present in the world, the Church responds to the signs and the needs of the times. Reaching out to our brothers and sisters who have been displaced from their homes for a visit of comfort is a new apostolate that congregations, parishes, Basic Christian Communities, and Catholic Action Movements must embrace if they want to be faithful witnesses of Jesus. The gentle presence of the Church should not be limited to the IDPs living in the host community. It should be extended to those in IDP camps whenever security restrictions allow. In this way, the Church does not wait for the IDPs to come to her. She goes out to meet them where they are.

Welcoming and reaching out to the IDP is the only antidote against individualism and isolation that they suffer from. Acts of presence from the Church embody its witness to Christ's compassionate love, which respects the dignity of the IDPs.

The next step that follows the visit is psycho-spiritual accompaniment. From the start, IDPs may not be open to talking about their traumatic experiences. Visits may be quiet or focus on the reality of the country, including the terrorism. Some IDPs may spontaneously discuss their immediate material needs in the hope of assistance. Once Church members start visiting the IDPs and build trust, naturally, they will share their stories and struggles. To offer emotional and psychological support to the IDPs, those who commit to visiting them should have a listening ear. Therefore, priests, religious, and lay pastoral care givers should be trained in basic counseling skills. To each IDP family or host family who opens their door, visitors need to introduce themselves. Even if it is evident that they are priests, religious, catechists, and lay Catholics, it remains essential to introduce and explain the purpose of their visit. The Church has heard that they arrived in the area following the insecurity in their village of origin and has come to visit them. The act of accompaniment, which creates a safe space for IDPs to share their stories, restores dignity and inner well-being. If it is a Catholic family, a visit can be concluded with a prayer, only with the family members' agreement. It can also be an opportunity to gently and prayerfully correct inauthentic images of God in IDPs who have experienced violence and suffering, which have distorted their images of God. To non-Catholic IDP families, introduce yourselves, but let them know that you are not here for a prayer session or bible study, as some Christian denominations and Jehovah's Witnesses present in the diocese are doing. The Church has come to let them know that she hears their cry.

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Witness through Charity Work

Hearing the cry of the poor and listening to their stories is good, but not enough. The Apostle warns that simply offering kind words to the poor without meeting their immediate material needs is inadequate (Cf James 2: 14 –17). After paying visits to the IDPs, listening to their stories and struggles, how does the Church's faith become concrete in service? The answer is through works of charity for: "... faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2: 17). As a Humanitarian actor, the Church exercises its kingly office of service. Caritas, the Church's primary instrument for humanitarian response to the IDPs, is encouraged to continue its work: distribution of food, clothing, shelters, and micro-initiatives. However, *Caritas*' actions are visibly confused with secular social work. To be a witness to Christ's love, it is essential to involve all parish entities in the new ministry on behalf of the IDPs. Instead of centralizing all humanitarian aid at *Caritas* as it has been done so far, we can imagine parish committees in the diocese organizing weekly food distribution. Creative activities, though small, if real, contribute to addressing the root causes of terrorism-induced displacement and the struggles of the IDPs. Establish parish-based welcome centers as safe spaces where IDPs can access immediate assistance and pastoral care, and are treated with dignity and compassion. Youth groups can run trauma healing workshops through dance, music, and art as part of the psychological support, affirming the IDPs' worth and documenting the lived experience of the IDPs to prevent their stories from being forgotten. Storytelling, art, and media humanize their experiences and help keep alive the memory of displacement to build a more just society.

Every IDP has the right to food, shelter, safety, and responsibilities to contribute to community life. Gillian MacNaughton

remarks that human rights mysteriously disappeared from the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Development Agenda, even though the resolution's introduction stated that it is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[43] The Diocese's moral power manifests itself in these circumstances through advocacy for the government protection of the IDPs' rights. Helping IDPs obtain or replace the lost identification papers, for example, will contribute to community safety and facilitate IDPs' social integration. A practical witness of God's love for humanity is to stand as one family with the IDPs by gathering the parish's vital resources and partners. Parish networks gather goods to share with IDPs. The Burkinabe proverb says that "when there is for one, there is for two." No one is poor enough to have nothing to share with the most unfortunate. Awareness campaigns in parishes and schools to cultivate empathy and solidarity. For community integration, pairing IDP families with local families for mutual support can reduce isolation and stigmatization. Encourage volunteerism among IDPs to strengthen community bonds.

While the preferential option for the poor —by which the needs of the most vulnerable are given priority—serves as a guiding principle, it can also function here as a viable strategic framework in the Church's interventions. Within vulnerable populations, certain groups are especially at risk. A targeted approach to assistance, therefore, prioritizes the most vulnerable groups in the distribution of goods. Children, women —particularly widows—and persons with disabilities (PWDs), are more susceptible to discrimination and often lack access to basic necessities for survival. From a strategic perspective, the

43 Gillian MacNaughton, "The mysterious disappearance of human rights in the 2030 Development Agenda," in *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Human Rights: History, Politics, Practice*, eds. Rajini Srikanth and Elora Halim Chowdhury (New York: Routledge, 2019), 131.

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Church must first direct its assistance to these groups within the IDP population. In doing so, it deliberately structures its humanitarian aid around the dignity and rights of those most at risk in the context of displacement. In the field of education, for example, Catholic schools, known for their quality formation, can play a vital role. Partnerships with these institutions could facilitate the waiving of fees or the establishment of scholarship programs for the children of IDPs. Catholic school teachers may volunteer to organize literacy or tutorial programs for IDP children. Similarly, to address healthcare needs, Catholic clinics can establish parish-based medical teams that provide mobile services, delivering basic medical care to IDPs in host communities and camps. For those unable to access hospital care due to financial constraints, the Church is called to reach out and care for the wounded, following the example of the Good Shepherd (Ezekiel 34:16). The preferential option for the poor, when applied as a strategic framework, also serves as a criterion for assessing the effectiveness of the Church interventions. Ultimately, the key question remains: to what extent have the Church's interventions impact the lives of the most vulnerable IDPs?

In responding to the plight of IDPs in the diocese, the Church's humanitarian action must be firmly rooted in the principles of dignity and human rights, prioritizing the human person as highlighted in the Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Social, political, and economic structures exist to serve the human person—created in the image of God and endowed with inherent dignity—not the other way around. Accordingly, aid efforts, especially those from Church-led initiatives, must not be reduced to mere logistical operations or abstract policy goals. Rather, they must be guided by a personalistic ethical approach that places the needs, rights, and dignity of each IDP at the center. While the distribution of emergency relief goods

is essential, respect for human dignity requires a careful evaluation of the community reality. In this regard, conducting participatory needs assessments involving both IDPs and host communities is crucial for identifying their most urgent needs (clothing, food, shelter, healthcare, education).

By prioritizing the person, the Church's humanitarian and pastoral workers ensure that their interventions respect the cultural identity. They ensure that all interventions foster participation and integral human development of the IDPs. This person-centered approach, which is a moral imperative, will be an effective way to restore hope, rebuild communities, and respect the sanctity of human life amid the crisis of displacement in the Diocese.

One method that can help the Church avoid transforming IDPs into passive recipients is the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Developed by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann, it is an approach that, when applied through the lens of CST, will transform IDPs from being passive recipients of the Church's charity to active agents of renewal. Yet, problems and needs revealed in the "see section" are overwhelming. But from an ABCD approach, the Church does not come as a savior to solve the community's problems and needs. The ABCD follows five key practical principles that foster the dignity and rights of IDPs and contribute to the common good of the community tied in solidarity and sustainable development.

First is an asset mapping rooted in dignity. The ABCD approach holds that a community thrives when it recognizes and uses its own resources. It focuses on assets rather than problems. So, this method begins by identifying the existing assets within the IDPs, the host communities, and the local Church. It spots the strengths, skills, and resources that the IDPs possess. In the vision of respecting the intrinsic dignity

of every individual IDP, the Diocese ensures that no IDP who has found refuge in its jurisdiction is left out of its charity programs. At the parish level, this can be easily done by establishing a parish-based registration system to identify all IDPs living there. After locating all the IDPs, the next step is mapping the assets. Among them are farmers, artisans, teachers, nurses, and even traditional healers. In fact, aside from vocational skills, IDPs also carry cultural and spiritual assets such as songs, rituals, and resilience practices.

Second is IDP-led actions. Development is most effective and sustainable when community members drive it. Once the mapping of assets is complete, always rooted in dignity, the Church encourages IDPs to take the initiative to solve the challenges they face in daily life. Let IDPs now initiate small-scale livelihoods such as gardening, crafts, and poultry projects that they themselves will lead. Decisions should be made at the most local level. Create IDP leadership councils to voice their needs and participate in project design. Local parish committees coordinate directly with the IDP communities. Partnership with local NGOs and the government to avoid duplication and maximize the impact. Subsidiarity is thus achieved through empowerment of local action in building the Capacity of both IDPs and the Church and community volunteers. At the diocesan, parish, and BEC levels, the Church can mobilize resources by forming "IDP Response Committees". The role of these committees would be to organize fundraising, collect goods for the IDPs, coordinate aid distribution, and monitor the needs.

Third, building relationships among individuals and groups strengthens collective action. Following previous discussions, the lack of social cohesion is at the same time a cause of the spread of terrorism and a consequence of it. To safeguard the common good, harmonizing society is indispensable. This

can be concretized through dialogue forums. Organizing dialogues between IDPs and members of host communities will contribute to reducing the legitimate tensions of fear. Discrimination and tensions generally arise from resource scarcity. Organizing joint activities between IDPs and the host community members helps increase local economic activity and build solidarity. They can share some farming or artisanal projects. Cultural festivals get people together and strengthen relationships. Opening parish structures like the parochial schoolyard or parish hall, as venues for collective events and activities, brings people together and enriches the Church's witness. *Erga Migrantes, Caritas Christi* provides guidance on the use of Church facilities by refugees and migrants from other religions.

Fourth, external organizations should play a supportive role and not lead the activities. To strengthen the Church's pastoral response to IDPs, this phase of the ABCD involves partnering with Caritas, local government structures, and NGOs. These partnerships aim to support IDP initiatives by leveraging technical expertise to exploit their available skills. The partners provide financial and logistical support, which parishes alone cannot sustain. The vision of institutional support for the common good also requires the design of initiatives that benefit both IDPs and the host community. Inclusive projects solve the competition over scarce resources within the community.

Fifth is a shift of perspective. The mindset impacts how a person or an organization works. The language the Church uses to describe IDPs, whether in discourse and in program design, reflects the mindset toward them, whether they are burdens and problems to solve or brothers and sisters to love. ABCD mindset moves away from a need-based approach to an

asset-based approach. It recommends not starting from what is missing but from what is already present. The church can deliberately change its mindset and practices towards the IDPs.

Prophetic Witness, Speaking the Truth

Terrorism and displacement are now giving substance to fake news in various media. The narratives of the IDPs are sometimes unheard at certain times and are manipulated. They need prophets who speak the truth and make their voice heard. From its Greek roots, prophets are persons who "speak *out* because they are boldly critical of their world; they speak *before* because they foresee the future; they speak *for* God as God's messengers."[44] Every baptized person in the Diocese has the mission to denounce violence, injustices, and structural causes of displacement. But for a more tangible impact, the public denunciation must come from Church leaders as representatives of the moral institution.

The example set by Cardinal Philippe Ouedraogo, through his message in Seoul, Korea, shows how boldly speaking out is a powerful witness of Christ's love for the IDPs and all the victims of terrorism. Requested to deliver a message on "The Church in Burkina Faso, Witness to Hope in the Face of Persecution by Violent Islamist Extremism," during the meeting of the Pontifical Foundation Aid for the Church in Need, held in Seoul, in July 2025, the Cardinal gave a prophetic witness. He prophetically unmasked the false narratives about terrorism and displacement in the country. His message was clear and strong: "The current conflict is not religious. It is political, economic, identity-based, and geostrategic. It disguises itself

44 Nolan, *Hope in an Age of Despair*, 89.

as religion to legitimize itself, but in reality, it betrays it."[45] This clarification of the nature of the conflict prevents manipulation of religion for selfish interests. It contributes to creating an atmosphere for peaceful co-existence and protects the IDPs from stigmatization and scapegoating. As the IDPs, the Church itself "is wounded, but she is standing. She is a witness of hope."[46] Even with no sign or very few signs of hope on the horizon, the Church remains hopeful, "hoping against hope" because God and God alone is the source of Christian hope. As a Church, our hope can become a sign of hope that strengthens IDPs and witnesses to the values of putting all one's trust in God. In times when everyone desponds, such a message of hope strengthens the Church itself and reassures the IDPs that they are not alone. When the Church acts and speaks with hope and confidence, she encourages IDPs to act boldly and confidently, and helps them not to lose hope.[47]

The Cardinal knew that, having an international audience, his message would have global appeal and call for solidarity with the IDPs. So, he gave an in-depth analysis of the situation and a cry for solidarity in the humanitarian crisis that millions of IDP families are facing. It was not the voice of any activist. It was the moral authority of the Church that Cardinal, with humility and courage, represented. This is exactly the role of biblical prophets: to confront injustice and point to God's justice.

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45 Cardinal Philippe Ouedraogo, "The Church in Burkina Faso, Witness of Hope in the Face of Persecution of Violent Islamist Extremism," Address to the participants of the Meeting of the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need, Seoul, July 2025, https://www.iesuscaritas.org/en/documentos/el-terrorismo-en-burkina-faso-no-es-una-cuestion-religiosa-philippe-ouedraogo/ (Accessed December 10, 2025). .

46 Ouedraogo, "The Church in Burkina Faso."

47 Nolan, *Hope in an Age of Despair*, 119.

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At the diocese level, the prophetic witness means bringing to light what many Burkinabe ignore about the reality of the IDPs: their suffering and denied dignity. Undeniably, everyone knows that they are victims of attacks and have lost their belongings. But few are aware of the mistreatment they receive from host communities. The Cardinal has spoken globally. The bishop and priests can speak locally with the same humility and courage. A strong yet gentle pastoral letter from the bishop to all his flock and all people of goodwill living in the Region is a good means of calling public attention to the IDPs' struggles for dignity and survival. Sunday preaching and teaching that connect the Gospel with the lived experience of the IDPs single out priests and catechists as prophets for their people.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Given the depth of the losses, the trauma, and the damage terrorism has caused, forgiveness and reconciliation are as urgent as challenging. The goal of forgiveness is the personal emotional and psychological well-being of the victims for, "the open wound that was never cured, the offense that was never forgiven, the rancour that is only going to hurt me, are all instances of a struggle that I carry within me, a little flame deep in my heart that needs to be extinguished before it turns into a great blaze."[48] Admittedly, forgiveness is hard but not impossible. The usual attitude of victims is to expect the guilty party to come and ask forgiveness, because society perceives forgiveness as a sign of weakness. No, on the contrary, forgiveness demonstrates the victim's inner strength to overcome hatred. It is a personal internal decision that does not needfully require the participation of the wrongdoer. IDPs can forgive

48 Pope Francis, "Revolution of Tenderness," Video Message, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Rome), April 28, 2017, Weekly Edition in English, 6.

even the terrorists and the hosts who have mistreated them during their integration into the community. Church pastoral workers who accompany IDPs may journey with them toward forgiveness.

Forgiveness is unconditional, even "in the face of something that cannot be forgotten for any reason, we can still forgive."[49] The usual reason evoked to hold a grudge against the offender is that "we are humans." Only God can forgive unconditionally. God also commands humans to forgive each other their evil deeds, and he gives the grace of forgiveness. Forgiveness demands justice, but justice is not revenge. The IDPs are not healed from traumatic experience by claiming the execution of terrorists. Nurturing revenge and hatred destroys one's inner peace.

> Revenge never truly satisfies victims. Some crimes are so horrendous and cruel that the punishment of those who perpetrated them does not serve to repair the harm done. Even killing the criminal would not be enough, nor could any form of torture prove commensurate with the sufferings inflicted on the victim. Revenge resolves nothing.[50]

The witness attitude of the pastoral worker is to recognize with the IDPs that they are humans, and it is difficult to forgive the terrorists who have killed their family members and destroyed their homes. The church stands to teach them to ask for the grace of a free and heartfelt forgiveness. Amid their suffering from loss and injustices, God's grace will make it easy for them to bear the burden and heal their hearts. The grace of forgiveness does not remove the pain they have suffered. It renews their strength, restores hope, and gives peace to move forward. At times, memories of the events and losses may trigger pain again. The forgiveness they have offered

49 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 250.

50 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 251.

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transforms them into witnesses of God's love even in the face of recurrent hardships.

Whereas forgiveness is the individual's decision not to seek revenge, reconciliation is a mutual process of restoring a broken relationship after conflict. Albert Nolan identifies three common mistakes that Christians often have about reconciliation: 1- the assumption that all conflicts are based on misunderstanding and that blame exists on both sides; 2- assuming that a person can be neutral in all cases of conflict; 3- the belief that Christians should always seek harmony and a middle way in every dispute, assuming that tension and conflict are worse evils than injustice and oppression.[51] In other words, what he tries to explain is that reconciliation is not an absolute principle to be applied in all cases of conflict. For example, thinking that both IDPs and the hosts who discriminate against them are just misunderstanding each other. For the sake of peace, the Church cannot take both IDPs and the host members who take advantage of their situation of vulnerability as equally right or equally wrong. It has to take the side of the oppressed. Trying to stay neutral would be siding with the oppressor.

By employing the ABCD method in its charitable work, the Church already contributes to improving the relationships between IDPs and host communities, who, in one way or another, have discriminated against them. Hosts need to acknowledge the injustices and bad treatment that they inflicted on IDPs, even if it was unwillingly. The Church does not call IDPs to forgive seventy times seven (Mth 18:22) when this involves renouncing their own rights, allowing the oppressor to keep oppressing the victims.[52] Conflicts with host communities must be seriously resolved through open dialogue among

51 Nolan, *Hope in an Age of Despair*, 65.

52 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 241.

the real parties. In this context, "Social forgiveness" that fails to identify the real individual oppressors has to be avoided. Facing conflict, not burying it in the past, is the best way to move on together. Reconciliation with the terrorists who have shattered their lives is not necessary. It is not the place to tempt some forgiveness ritual where victims are demanded to forgive the invisible persons and institutions behind the terrorists and the terrorists themselves, who may have neutralized.

With respect to the innocent IDPs, the Church, on one hand, claims justice and, on the other hand, works for reconciliation. Justice and forgiveness are not contradictory. Dialogue of Life nurtures everyday encounters. When priests, religious, laypeople, and the Church's institutions share the burdens of the IDPs, listen to their stories with a compassionate heart, and extend them the hospitality they need, the Church opens the doors of forgiveness and reconciliation. Through simple acts of solidarity that build relationships within the communities, the Church becomes a living witness that forgiveness heals and leads to reconciliation. Messages of peace are crucial for reconciliation to happen. Peace, being the number one requirement for the common good, must be preached to all. Sunday homilies and diocesan radio programs can promote non-violence, reconciliation, and unity during these difficult times. Interfaith collaboration with leaders of Traditional Religion and Muslims builds peace and mutual support. Our actions have the power to inspire hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and bring about positive changes in IDPs' lives and to the whole community.

Limitations and Difficulties Faced by the Church

In its efforts to promote the integral human dignity of the IDPs, the Church of Fada N'Gourma faces multiple limitations and challenges. Despite all its goodwill, there are structural

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constraints which the Church can hardly overcome. For example, the Diocesan Caritas has mentioned that resource scarcity is the main limitation in their responses. The influx of IDPs continuously strains the already limited resources of the Diocese. The financial means to provide food supplies and infrastructure are very limited compared to the scale of IDPs in the Diocese. The demands for food, shelter, and medical care exceed the Church's capacity. The Church depends on Caritas, which in turn relies mostly on international partners and donors. The Church then has no full autonomy in responding. The growing global silence about the severe humanitarian crisis in the Sahel leaves the Church's actions and projects underfunded. Additionally, the high security risks because of the ongoing terrorist violence and instability restrict the Church's pastoral outreach and humanitarian assistance in the most affected areas. Some remote IDPs' host communities are inaccessible due to armed groups or poor roads. Despite all the projects, IDPs' inability to secure farmlands or stable employment traps them in perpetual dependency. Hence, obstructing the CST principle of active participation and the dignity of work.

Other obstacles are practical challenges that can be addressed even though they require more effort, creativity, and perseverance. The Diocese has difficulty in creating and aligning parish-level initiatives with NGOs and Government agencies. The issue of cultural sensitivity remains relevant even in the context of displacement. The Church has to navigate among the ethnic tensions. The mistrust between the displaced groups hinders the Church's response to their urgent needs and efforts for justice and peace. The pressures of social cohesion pose serious obstacles to the Church's aid effort. Developmental programs are conceived to include host families and to avoid conflict over resources. Nevertheless, tensions

of this nature are not lacking. Often tensions between depleted host communities and IDP populations challenge the local Church to carry out its mission as an instrument of universal friendship and social unity. The current situation of people living day to day, unsure of their basic physical needs, makes it difficult for the Church to sustain long-term psychosocial rehabilitation and human promotion. Even formal education of children and vocational training for adults become difficult when IDPs are just struggling for survival. Dignity constantly calls on the Church to move beyond emergency relief to sustainable strategies for dignity.

Distinctiveness of the Church Charity Aid

Spiritual Witness free from Proselytism

The Church's mission is holistic. She engages in integral human development through her threefold mission: proclamation, celebration, and charity. The celebration of the sacraments underscores the uniqueness of the Church's charitable activity among the IDPs since the liturgy is "the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed and also the font from which its power flows."[53] The liturgy, especially the Eucharist, animates the life of the Church and sanctifies all her deeds. Daniel G. Groody's reflection on the foundations of migration and the Eucharist describes the latter as "the summary of the entire message of Jesus because it recalls all that Jesus stood for, all that he stood against, and all whom he stood with in his proclamation of the kingdom of God."[54] Church's human-

53 Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), no. 10.

54 Daniel G. Groody, *A Theology of Migration: The Bodies of Refugees and the Body of Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 208.

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itarian actions are a prolongation of the Mass in response to the final sending out to love and serve one another. Indeed, when the Church remembers Jesus' institutional words of the Eucharist, she also "remembers his outreach to those who had become dis-membered from the body of the community."[55] The eucharistic vision of communion does not end at the door of the Church. Those who have partaken in the body and blood of Christ and become what they ate are sent out to be bread for the world, especially for the hungry IDPs. Despite being done outside the context of public worship, the Church's charity work is rooted in and leads towards an active participation in it. In feeding the IDPs, sheltering them, and caring for their needs, the Church recognizes the real presence of Jesus in the poor, a real presence that is no less than Jesus' presence in the Eucharist. Eucharistic witness is faith in action. Rooting responses in the Eucharist calls believers to unity and service for the poor.

However, the Church's practice of charity is not a means for proselytizing. The Church, as a beacon of justice and equality, seeks to defend the dignity of every IDP regardless of religion. Christian love is free and unconditional, and it does not have a hidden religious agenda of converting people. However, God and Christ must not be set aside, since the deepest cause of suffering is the absence of God. The church can and must take the initiative to provide pastoral care to IDPs with an inter-religious approach.[56] Followers of Christ recognize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom

55 Groody, *A Theology of Migration*, 213.

56 Faith Encounters in Social Action V (FEISA V), "Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees: A New Way of Being Church – From Distrust to Respect... Rejection to Welcome," Study Days, in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 2002-2006*, edited by Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, vol. 4 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2007), 117-126.

they believe, which drives them to love in return God and the neighbor.[57] Charity should not be used to coerce or persuade the vulnerable IDPs to embrace the Catholic faith. It would be an abuse and a violation of their rights. In contrast to some Christian denominations present in the Diocese that turn their distribution times into occasions for preaching, the Church does not impose on non-Christian-Catholic IDPs to attend liturgical service or catechism before they can receive any emergency relief assistance. The local Church, as God's family, becomes a place where people from the BEC to the diocesan levels are trained to serve those outside her confines who need help.[58] The Church wisely takes into consideration the diverse factors, mainly, "the Christian duty to Christ, the life-giving word which must be proclaimed, the right of the human person (religious freedom), and the measure of grace granted by God through Christ to men who are invited freely to accept and profess the faith."[59] "The poor who are often rich in faith and hope,"[60] whether Christians or not, become evangelizers.

Humanitarian Aid Free from Political Ideologies

The intersection of the Church's mission with governance, policy, and cultural influence raises questions about alignment with the State or donors' priorities. The faith-based

57 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html, no. 31c.

58 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 32.

59 Vatican Council II, *Declaration on Religious Freedom, Dignitatis Humanae: On the Right of the Person and Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious*, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html, no. 14.

60 Pope Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter, Evangelii Nuntiandi: On Evangelization in the Modern World*, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/paul06/p6evan.htm, no. 76.

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humanitarian assistance to the IDPs risks becoming political because the prophetic witness of speaking out the truth on an important topic, such as displacement, places the Church in political debates. The essential point that differentiates the Church's humanitarian aid from others' is that Christian charitable activity is, or must be, uninfluenced by parties and ideologies, and instead must be a way of making present here and now the love that men and women always need.[61] In response to Christ's invitation, "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37), the Church loves and serves without any hidden political agenda. Even though the Church's commitment to the option for the poor requires critical opposition to unjust economic and political systems, she remains a non-partisan institution. "When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular or political stand would have."[62]

Secular funding organizations that support the Church in her mission are embedded in global norms. International frameworks in themselves reflect political choices regarding values, rights, and modes of governance. A humanitarian organization that relies on government or intergovernmental funding to realize its plans becomes an instrument to implement the political ideology of the governing body in place. Unintentionally or not, humanitarian structures align with political ideas of the local or foreign states' donors. These agencies tend to impose their political goals as conditions for financing projects on behalf of the IDPs. On several occasions, Pope Francis did not fail to warn rich nations that use their humanitarian and development programs as vehicles of

61 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no.31b.

62 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, Encyclicals, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, no. 7.

ideological influence on poor countries, especially in the areas of reproductive health, family planning, abortion, and gender theory. The Pope calls such aid conditionalities "ideological colonization." It undermines human dignity and the cultural autonomy of the poor nations. Aid must respect the local values and traditions.

Areas for Improvement

The above-mentioned distinctive characteristics set the Church's aid apart from other actors involved in the crisis' resolution, but that does not mean that the Church's response is perfect. No human or institutional response to the problem of internal displacement caused by terrorism can be flawless. So, no Church's response to the IDPs' dignity is perfect. Its intervention reflects the core tenets of CST, including dignity, solidarity, preferential option for the poor, and common good. Yet some flaws are noticeable in the implementation of these principles. The first area necessitating immediate address is the coordination gaps. Sometimes, the Church's programs parallel those of other NGOs and government. Coordination with others would prevent the Church from unnecessarily duplicating efforts while neglecting some urgent matters. The lack of coordination shadows the realization of the preferential option for the poor because the Church cannot accurately identify those IDPs who are most in need. Sometimes the assistance from the Church to the IDPs is misdirected and unevenly distributed. If other religious groups and local or international NGOs do not come to the Church, the Church, by virtue of its mission, must take the first step to strengthen collaboration to avoid inefficiency in its actions. Working in isolation from local associations undermines synodality and the spirit of solidarity. A concrete partnership with local government and religious

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agencies could expand the Church's pastoral outreach program and would be a vivid witness to interreligious dialogue.

The Church is also facing the difficulty of providing a holistic pastoral accompaniment that balances spiritual and psychological support amid trauma and material aid. Emphasis is often put on material needs, neglecting the psychospiritual aspect. Or oftentimes the IDPs easily open up their material needs rather than their spiritual and/or psychological struggles. The ministry of presence as a sign of God's presence to the IDPs is good, but it needs more professionalism. It should be accompanied by more structured professional trauma counseling and systematic accompaniment programs for the mental health of the IDPs. This would help them rebuild strong resilience faster. Instead of centralizing the Church's assistance to IDPs at the level of the Diocesan Caritas as it is done now, the Diocese could empower lay leaders, catechists, and local youth volunteers to take responsibility for the IDP ministry. The Church could consolidate the practice of subsidiarity by investing more in training the local communities to ensure that the responses at the parish level do not overly depend on the clergy.

Conclusion

Despite their inherent and inviolable dignity, the displacement puts IDPs in a less dignified situation at the social, moral, and existential dimensions of dignity. These aspects of dignity that are denied to IDPs are reflected in their living conditions and their daily challenges and struggles for socio-economic and psycho-spiritual integration. Grounded on the ontological dignity of the human person, the Church intervenes in emergency humanitarian relief and development programs to uphold the dignity of the IDPs. The concentration of the Church's contribution at Caritas, which has NGO status, risks

gradually obscuring the distinctiveness of Catholic charity aid from secular humanitarian assistance, since any direct and explicit proclamation of the Gospel message to the IDPs under the cover of charity is to be avoided. Initiating parish-led activities would equally risk dissociating the faith aspect of Christian charity. Consequently, the Church's aid tends to be more focused on dole-out activities and some development projects.

The Church has a social mission that is not limited to Catholics but is extended to all. It cannot fulfill this significant mission by remaining closed to itself. Catholic Social Teaching offers foundational principles for a Christian witness that does not impose Christianity on the IDPs, beneficiaries of the Church's aid. By presenting feasible actions and strategies that enable the Church to implement the moral and ethical principles into its response to the IPDs' plight, this bridges the gap between theory and practice. To achieve the bridging between theory and practice, the lived experiences of the IDPs have been scrutinized through the lens of the four aspects of human dignity.

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