

**Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)**  
**First Plenary Assembly of 2026**

*19 – 26 February 2026*

- Honourable Chairman of this Meeting.
- Your Grace, Archbishop Lucius Iwejuro Ugorji, President of the CBCN.
- Your Eminences, Cardinal John Onaiyeken, Archbishop emeritus of Abuja, Cardinal Peter Ebere Okpaleke, Bishop of Ekwulobia.
- Your Grace, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, Archbishop of Abuja.
- My brother Bishops.
- Dear Reverend Fathers and Sisters and lay staff of the Catholic Secretariat.
- Distinguished guests already recognised, and, in particular,
  
- Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

Today, is already the third plenary assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria that I have the great honour and privilege to attend as the Holy Father's representative to Nigeria. It hardly seems possible, as my arrival in Nigeria in October 2024 still seems so recent to me. Since then, I have had the opportunity to visit many dioceses and many parts of Nigeria. I am extremely grateful for the warm reception that I have received, and it has helped me, in no small way, to get to know the realities, the joys and sorrows, of the Church in Nigeria. The more I

get to know, the more I realise that I have still more to learn! Thus, I look forward to continuing that journey of discovery and visiting those dioceses that I have not visited yet.

Today's date is February 22<sup>nd</sup> and were it not for the fact that it coincides this year with the First Sunday of Lent, we would be celebrating the feast of the Chair of Peter. The Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle is a feast that celebrates the authority and mission given by Christ to St Peter and his successors. It symbolises the unity of the Church under the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who continues Peter's role as Vicar of Christ and the visible head of the Church on earth.

Thus, today's feast, although not observed this year for liturgical reasons, reminds of the role that the Successor of St Peter, the Bishop of Rome, has received from Jesus Christ with these words: "*You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my Church*" (Matthew 16:18). Thus, rooted in the words of Jesus, Peter, and all his successors, was given a unique authority in the Church to confirm the brothers in the faith, to safeguard doctrine, to foster unity and to shepherd the faithful.

Since last year's first plenary, we have a new Bishop of Rome, a new successor of St Peter, in the person of Pope Leo XIV. So, let us remember to pray for His Holiness Pope Leo XIV; that the Lord, who has entrusted to him the petrine ministry of being the universal Shepherd of the Church, may continue to bless, guide and protect him so that he may be strengthened in wisdom and courage to guide that flock that has been given to him.

It is also significant that the solemn opening of this year's first plenary assembly of the CBCN of 2026 should coincide with the Feast of the Chair of St Peter as it falls literally in the final days before you make your *Ad Limina* visit to Rome – or to give its full title *Ad Limina Apostolorum* which literally means “*to the thresholds of the Apostles*” meaning the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the two pillars of the Church of Rome, recalling the pilgrimages throughout the ages to the tombs of the Apostles upon which Christ founded his Church. The institution and obligation of every episcopate to render a visit to Rome is a long tradition in the Church and it is a sign of the effective and affective communion of each local Church throughout the world with the Pope, the Successor of St Peter the first Bishop of Rome, and the Vicar of Christ on earth.

Dear Bishops, I wish you a fruitful *Ad Limina* visit to Rome. It will be an opportunity for you to be renewed in your communion with the Holy Father founded on the witness of the Apostles who were sent forth by Christ to bring the Gospel to all the nations. It will also be an opportunity for you, in a spirit of communion, to share with the Holy Father and the various offices of the Roman Curia, the challenges and hopes of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. I pray that you will return from Rome renewed and strengthened in your zeal for the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ in your respective dioceses.

Your Grace, dear Bishops of the CBCN, you have chosen as the theme for this first plenary assembly “*The common good and Leadership in Nigeria*”. No doubt, the starting point for this theme is your statement,

*Peace in Nigeria: Moving from Fragility to Stability* which you issued on the 25<sup>th</sup> November last.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the CBCN for that timely statement on the violence, killings and insecurity that rips apart the fabric of social cohesion of Nigeria. In the light of the worsening situation on insecurity in Nigeria, you have rightly called upon the competent authorities of Nigeria “*to urgently and decisively fulfil its foremost duty, as mandated by... the 1999 Constitution, to protect the lives and property of all citizens*”. In such trying circumstances, your statement has been one of hope because of the “*remarkable resilience and trust [of the Nigerian people] in the promise of a better future*”.

Dear Bishops, in that statement you have called upon every citizen of Nigeria, irrespective of religion, tribe, or political persuasion, “*to remain united in the quest for peace and the rebuilding of our common life.*” Our common life. Dear Bishops, you have rightly touched on this fundamental idea of “*our common life*” because a shared common life is at the heart of every society, whether religious or secular. In your statement you continued:

*“Every Nigerian is called to be an agent of healing, to reject hatred and retaliation, to speak words that foster understanding, and to uphold justice, dialogue, and mutual respect. Peace is not the responsibility of a select few. It is the duty of all. Rather than engaging in divisive arguments about who has suffered more losses, we should stand together in defending the sacredness of every human life and protecting the vulnerable. Together, we can*

*transform our diversity into strength and build a nation that truly reflects harmony, justice, and hope.”*

Therefore, from the idea of “*our common life*” you have chosen the theme “*the Common Good and Leadership in Nigeria*”. The ‘*Common Good*’ denotes shared values, such as rejecting hatred and retaliation, fostering understanding, upholding justice, dialogue and mutual respect. You have rightly said that peace is not the preserve of the few, but it does require leadership, but not the leadership of the few, but the leadership of the many: at every level of every unit of society; in the home, in our communities; in our churches; in the workplace; and finally in political life, which must always be at the service of the common good, the good that serves all, and by which a nation can be built that “*truly reflects harmony, justice and hope*”.

Your Grace, I thank you for your Address, you have offered much for reflection and deliberation during the coming days.

Dear brother Bishops, let me conclude by invoking the Holy Spirit upon you, that your deliberations as Pastors in the coming days may be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the message of Jesus Christ, for the good of all and for the common good of society and for all Nigerians.

Abuja, 22 February 2026.

✠ Michael F. Crotty  
*Titular Archbishop of Lindisfarne*  
*Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria*