



**CATHOLIC YOUTH
ORGANISATION OF NIGERIA
ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS**



**40th
AYD**
LAGOS ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTH DAY
**MARY'S
LAND**

THEME

**"TAKE COURAGE!
I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD!"**

John 16:33

Sunday 9th August, 2026

📍 Maryland Comprehensive Secondary School, Maryland, Lagos.

10:00am Mass

Chief Celebrant

His Grace

MOST. REV. DR. ALFRED ADEWALE MARTINS
Archbishop of the Metropolitan see of Lagos

**The
R|ace**



St Gregory's College
S.W. Lagos (Boys Only)



Holy Child College
S.W. Lagos (Girls Only)



St. Patrick's College
Akoka (Boys Only)



Marywood Girls College
Shomolu (Girls Only)



St. Thomas Aquinas
Catholic College, Oshodi
(Co-Educational)



St. Anthony's College, Surulere
(Co-Educational)



Mother Elizabeth College
Epe, Lagos
(Co-Educational)



Sacred Heart College
Agege (Co-Educational)



Maryland Comprehensive
Sec. School, Maryland
(Co-Educational)



Our Lady of Apostles
Yaba (Girls Only)



OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST



BLESSED VIRGIN MARY



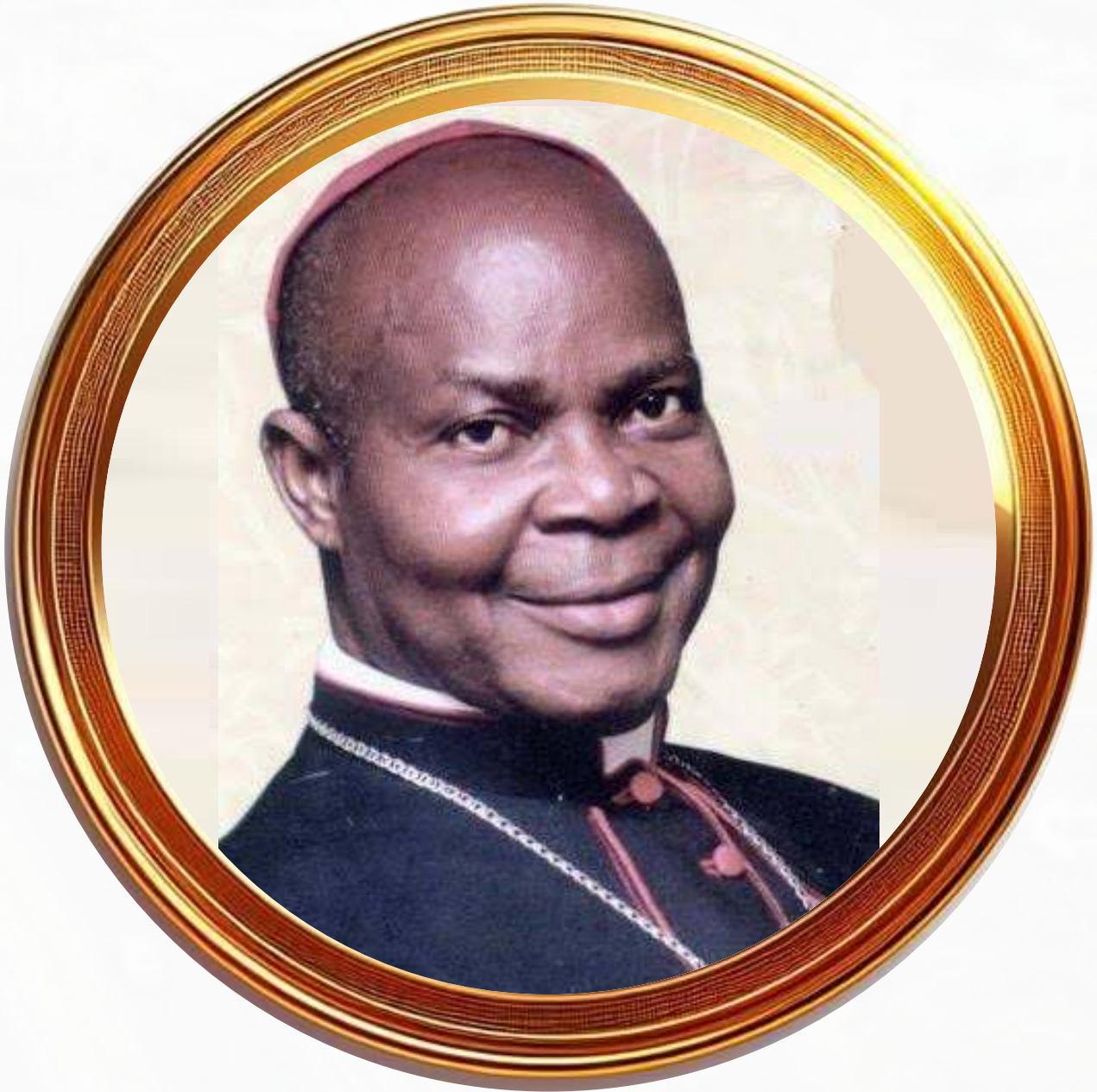
ST. CHARLES L'WANGA
Patron Saint of African Catholic Youths



His Holiness
POPE LEO XIV



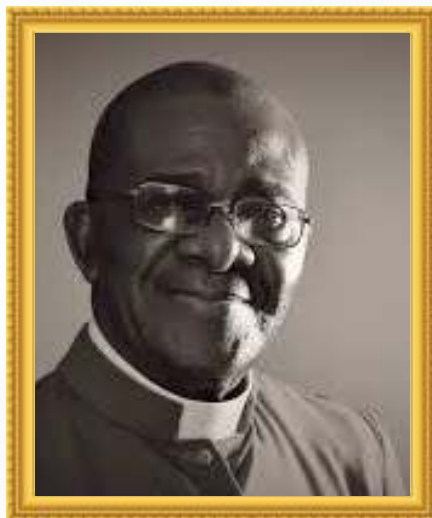
His Grace
**MOST. REV. DR. ALFRED
ADEWALE MARTINS**
Archbishop of the Metropolitan see of Lagos



His Eminence
ANTHONY CARDINAL OKOGIE
Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Lagos



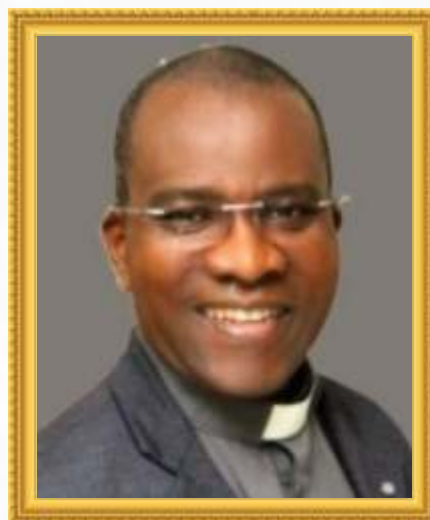
EPISCOPAL VICARS



RT. REV MSGR JOHN K. ANIAGWU
Vicar General, Archdiocese of Lagos



VERY REV. MSGR. PASCAL NWAEZEAPU
Episcopal Vicar, Lekki Region



VERY REV. FR. ANTHONY FADAIRO
Episcopal Vicar, Ikeja Region



VERY REV. FR. JULIUS OLAITAN
Episcopal Vicar, Lagos Region



VERY REV. FR. FRANCIS ANYANWU
Episcopal Vicar, Badagry Region



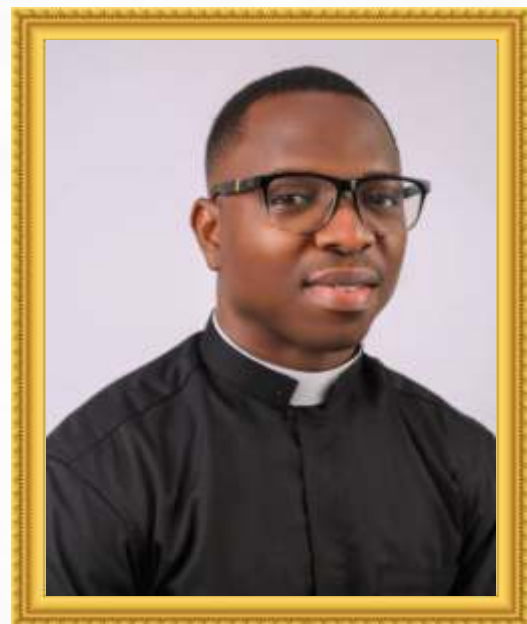
ARCHDIOCESAN CYON CHAPLAINS



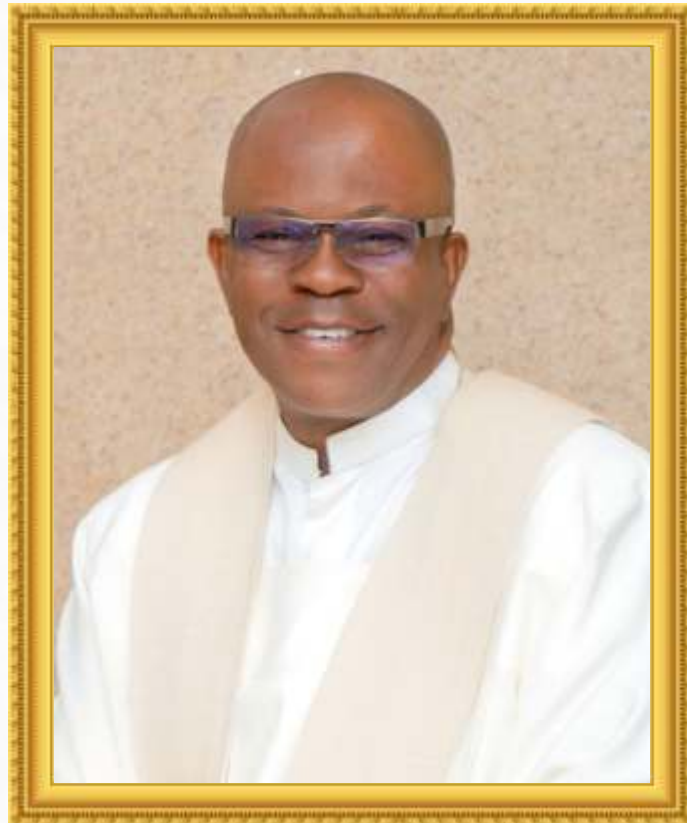
REV. FR. OTUKPE PAULMARY
Chaplain



REV. FR. MARTINS ADESANYA
Deputy Chaplain 1



REV. FR. BENJAMIN ODII
Deputy Chaplain 2



VERY REV. FR. SIMEON IWU
Dean, Maryland Deanery



REV. FR. MOSES AKAEME
CYON Chaplain Maryland Deanery



ARCHDIOCESAN CYON EXECUTIVES



VIVIAN OZIOMA IBUODINMA
VICE PRESIDENT



ESTHER SHIBIGEM AMARACHI
GENERAL SECRETARY



MARYSANDRA CHIDINMA
AMAZOBI
ASST. GEN. SECRETARY



GODWIN CHRISTOPHER OGBONNA
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AUGUSTINE ONWUDIWE, A
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER 1



CHUKWUEMEKA ANYIAM-OSIGWE
PRESIDENT



RICHARD IFEANYI IGWE
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER 2



JOHN EBUKE ILOBAH
DIRECTOR OF SOCIALS 1



PETER NWOSU
DIRECTOR OF SOCIALS 2



SYLVIA A. OKPATA
FAITH FORMATOR



EBENIZER ADEKUNLE
WELFARE 1



PRINCEWILL OKONKWO
PROVOST 1



CHIJOKE EZUGWU
EX-OFFICIO 1



PIUS ERHURUN
EX-OFFICIO 2



NATIONAL EXECUTIVE FROM LAGOS ARCHDIOCESE



ELIZABETH OJIABOR
National Vice President 1

LEP EXECUTIVES FROM LAGOS ARCHDIOCESE



SUNDAY CHRISTOPHER MUSA
President



KAREN UCHE
General Secretary



TEMITOPE AJAYI
Public Relations Officer 1



LANRE DAVID FOLORUNSHO
Director of Social 1



ENI E. ENI
Ex-Officio 1



YOUTH GROUPS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE



Rev. Fr. Sylvester Oladunjoye

Coordinator, Propagation of Faith (POF)
and Young Missionary Movement of Nigeria
(YOMM) Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos



Rev. Fr. Simon O. Iduh, CM

National Association of Catholic
Corpers (NACC) Chaplain, Lagos State.



Rev. Fr. Gabriel Fatoye

NFCS Lagos Archdiocesan (LADEC)
Chaplain



Anyakie Ginavivian

Archdiocesan President, Young Missionary
Movement of Nigeria (YOMM),
Catholic Archdiocesan of Lagos



Amaefule Michase Uneze

National Association of Catholic
Corpers (NACC) President Lagos State



Ohanu Lilian Chidimma

NFCS Lagos Archdiocesan Vice President



Rev. Fr. Samuel Emenorgu

Chaplain Young Catholic Students
of Nigeria, Lagos Archdiocese (LACYCSN)



Chuwkuebuka Mario Clement

Young Catholic Students of Nigeria
(YCSN) Archdiocesan Coordinator



MARYLAND DEANERY CYON EXECUTIVES



OKORO ALOYSIUS
Coordinator



DERRICK OBIDIEGWU
General Secretary



DAVID JACKSON
Financial Secretary



ZITA OSEMEKE
Acting Director of Social



CASSANDRA C. IGWE
Welfare Officer



ETIM PATRICIA
Provost 1



CLIFFORD ONAH UKPO
Acting Provost 2



**MRS. OGHENERO
ANYIAM**
Ex-Officio 1



**JONATHAN EMMANUEL
ELIAGWU**
Ex-Officio 2



Archdiocese of Lagos

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A KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS GRACE, MOST REV. DR. ALFRED ADEWALE MARTINS, THE ARCHBISHOP OF LAGOS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40TH ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTH DAY ON SUNDAY 9TH AUGUST 2026.

I warmly welcome and felicitate with you all on the occasion of the 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day Celebration. This is indeed a remarkable milestone in the life of our Archdiocese and a special moment of thanksgiving to God for His abundant blessings upon our young people over the past forty years. We gather once again as one family of faith to celebrate God's goodness, to renew our commitment to Christ, and to deepen the bonds of unity that make us a vibrant and hopeful Church.

This year, you gather under the inspiring theme: *"Take Courage! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). These words were spoken by Jesus to His disciples shortly before His Passion. He knew they would encounter trials, persecution, disappointments, and moments of fear. Yet, rather than leaving them discouraged, He strengthened them with a promise of hope and victory. He reminded them that although the world may present many challenges, His triumph over sin, suffering, and death remains the source of courage for all believers.

These words are especially relevant to you, living in a rapidly changing world marked by uncertainty, economic hardship, social pressures, moral confusion, and the growing influence of digital culture. Many young people today struggle with questions about their future, their identity, their purpose, and their place in society. At times, the challenges may seem overwhelming. Yet Christ speaks directly to your hearts today: *"Take Courage! I have overcome the world."* He invites you not to be overcome by fear, anxiety, or despair, but to place your trust firmly in Him.

Courage is the strength to remain faithful to God even in the face of difficulties, opposition, and uncertainty. It enables us to stand for truth, choose what is right, and trust in Christ whose presence strengthens us always. This courage is expressed not only in extraordinary deeds but also in everyday acts of prayer, forgiveness, honesty, purity, and faithful Christian living. We find inspiring examples in the saints, especially Blessed Carlo Acutis, who used modern technology to spread the Gospel and remained deeply devoted to the Eucharist. His life reminds us that holiness is possible for young people today and that true happiness is found in friendship with Christ.

As we commemorate this Ruby Jubilee of the Archdiocesan Youth Day, I encourage you to become ambassadors of hope in your families, schools, workplaces, parishes, and communities. Do not allow yourselves to be defined by the limitations of the world around you. Instead, allow Christ to shape your vision, guide your decisions, and inspire your dreams.

On behalf of the Clergy, Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese of Lagos, I commend you all to the intercession of St. Charles Lwanga and his companions, patron saints of youth, and to the loving maternal care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May they accompany you on your journey of faith and help you to remain steadfast in Christ. May the Lord strengthen you with His grace so that, in every circumstance of life, you may hear His voice saying: *"Take Courage! I have overcome the world."*

Yours faithfully,

Archbishop of Lagos.





**ADDRESS BY REV. FR OTUKPE PAULMARY,
ARCHDIOCESAN CYON CHAPLAIN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS AT THE 40TH ARCHDIOCESAN
YOUTH DAY CELEBRATION MARYLAND, AUGUST 9TH
2026.**



Beloved in the Lord,

With profound joy and gratitude to God, I warmly welcome you all to this 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day celebration. It is a privilege to gather once again as one family of faith, united by our love for Christ and our shared commitment to Evangelization as we connect with one another.

Our celebration today is more than an annual gathering, it is an encounter with God. It is an opportunity to pause from the demands of daily life, listen attentively to His voice, renew our faith, strengthen our friendships, and rediscover the purpose for which He has called each one of us as Youths.

Our theme this year, "**Take Courage! I Have Overcome the World**" (John 16:33), speaks directly to the reality many young people experience today. You live in a world filled with uncertainty, competing voices, economic pressures, social expectations, and constant distractions. Yet Christ does not promise you a life without challenges, he promises His presence in every challenge. His victory on the cross over sin & death gives meaning to our struggles and hope for our future.

As your Chaplain, I urge you to approach every session of today with an open mind and a prayerful heart. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you, to correct you where necessary, to strengthen your faith, and to inspire you to become authentic witnesses of the Gospel in your Homes, Schools, Workplaces, Campuses, and Parishes.

Our generation needs young Catholics who pray sincerely, lead with integrity, serve generously, defend the truth with charity, and live their faith without compromise. The Church does not simply need your attendance; she needs your conviction, your talents, your voices, and your commitment to building God's Kingdom wherever He has placed you.

It is also necessary to call your attention to your civic responsibility to our nation, namely the 2027 Elections. I encourage you to get your PVC, participate actively and not passively by casting your vote according to your conscience. We continue to pray for our country and our Leaders that God will help them to serve our nation faithfully, as well as shun corruption and injustice while discharging their services to the nation.

We are grateful to His Grace, our Baba, Most Rev. Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins; for his steadfastness towards Evangelization in the life of the Youth of our Archdiocese and beyond. We also congratulate His Grace on his new appointment as Member of the Discastery for Evangelization. May the Lord continue to bless and keep you for us.

I also thank the Episcopal Vicar of Ikeja Region Very Rev. Fr. Anthony Fadairo, the Dean of Maryland Deanery very Rev. Fr. Simeon Iwu, my associates Rev. Frs. Adesanya Martins & Odii Benjamin, Priests, Religious, the OLA Sisters, Youth Leaders, Coordinators, Volunteers, Benefactors, and every person whose sacrifice has made this day possible.

May this 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day celebration mark the beginning of a deeper spiritual journey for each one of us. May we leave this gathering with renewed courage, strengthened faith, and hearts ready to answer God's call with generosity and joy.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and St. Charles Lwanga and Companions continue to intercede for us.

For God and For Youth..... through Christ.

Rev. Fr. Otukpe Paulmary
Archdiocesan CYON Chaplain



**ADDRESS BY VERY REV. FR SIMEON IWU DEAN
MARYLAND DEANERY AT THE 40TH ARCHDIOCESAN
YOUTH DAY CELEBRATION MARYLAND, AUGUST 9TH
2026.**



My dear young people in Christ,

I warmly greet you all, and welcome you to Maryland Deanery.

First of all, let us thank God for the gift of life and for bringing us together today. Seeing all of you here fills me with joy and hope. I have the privilege of serving as the Dean of Maryland Deanery and I want you to know that I am proud of you. Not because you have everything figured out, but because you are here. In a world that constantly pulls young people away from God, you have chosen to answer His call. Please, do not allow the faith within you to grow cold.

Permit me to speak to you as a father. Over the years, I have learnt that while parents, priests, and the Church can guide and support you, the choices you make today will determine the future you build tomorrow. I know these are challenging times. Many of you carry worries about your future, your careers, and your personal struggles. But I encourage you: do not lose hope. Do not give in to fear or discouragement. Use your time and your youthful energy wisely. Develop yourselves. Learn a skill.

Read. Pray. Stay close to God.

Remember, discipline is preparation, not punishment. The sacrifices you make today will preserve your tomorrow.

My dear young people, you are not only the future of the Church; you are the Church today. The Church needs your faith, your talents, your energy, and your witness. As I look at you, I see future leaders, professionals, parents, priests, religious, and saints. My prayer is that you will become a light to others, a steady light that points people to Christ.

Thank you for coming. Thank you for believing. And thank you for remaining in the Church.

May Almighty God bless you, protect you, and guide you always.

Go forth and shine for Christ.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

Very Rev. Fr. Simeon Iwu
Dean
Maryland Deanery



WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE CYON PRESIDENT, ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40TH ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTH DAY (AYD)

His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins,
Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Lagos,
Our Episcopal Vicars,
The Dean of Maryland Deanery, Very Reverend Father
Simeon Iwu,
Reverend Fathers and Religious present,
Distinguished Guests,
Executive Council Members,
Co-hosting Committee of Maryland Deanery,
And my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ—the
vibrant Lay Faithful and Youths of Lagos Archdiocese.
Welcome to our landmark 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day!

This is a bittersweet moment for me as it marks the fourth
and final AYD I will oversee in my official capacity as
President. As I prepare to hand over this responsibility, I
pray that this celebration will be our most memorable yet
and that it will inspire a new generation of courageous
Catholic youth.

In the Scripture, 40 represents a season of maturity,
transformation, and readiness for a new journey. Over
the last four decades, the Catholic Youth Organisation of
Nigeria, Lagos Archdiocese has nurtured generations of
faith-filled leaders, professionals, and saints.

Four decades ago, a vision was planted across our
Archdiocese to gather, nourish, and empower young
Catholics. Today, as we stand on the historic grounds of
Maryland Comprehensive Secondary School, co-hosted
by the dynamic Maryland Deanery, we celebrate forty
years of faith, resilience, and fellowship.

Our theme this year, *“Take Courage: I have overcome
the world”* (Jn 16:33), could not come at a more crucial
time. As young people in a rapidly changing world, we
face intense economic pressure, social uncertainty, and
personal doubts. Yet, Christ's promise remains
unshakable. He does not offer us a life free of trouble; He
promises us victory through Him.

Courage is not the absence of struggle—it is faith in
action. And True faith calls us to active Christian witness
in our daily lives and in society. As we look ahead to the
2027 general elections, I urge every Catholic youth here:
do not be passive observers of destiny. Register, obtain
your Voter's Card, and exercise your civic duty with
integrity. Our faith must light the path to good
governance and positive national transformation. We



also pray that within our Archdiocese God would raise up
amongst us, God-fearing leaders that would take CYON
Lagos Archdiocese to greater heights at every levels -
from our parishes to the Archdiocesan leadership.

I express my deepest gratitude to His Grace, Archbishop
Martins, for his unwavering paternal love, and to all our
priests for their pastoral care. To Maryland Deanery,
thank you for your selfless hospitality.

My dear youths, let this 40th celebration ignite your spirit.
Stand firm, live purposefully, and walk with bold faith. As
we celebrate 40 years of God's faithfulness, may we
continue to be courageous disciples, steadfast in hope,
unwavering in faith, and committed to building a society
worthy of Christ's Gospel.

Jesus has overcome the world—and in Him, so shall we!
God bless the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria!

God bless the Archdiocese of Lagos!
God bless you all.

For God and for youth... through Christ.
Warm regards,
Chukwuemeka Anyiam-Osigwe (MBA).
President, CYON Lagos Archdiocese.



WELCOME ADDRESS BY CYON COORDINATOR, MARYLAND ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40TH ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTH DAY

His Grace, Most Rev. Dr Alfred Adewale Martins, The Archbishop of the Metropolitan see of Lagos.

The Episcopal Vicar, Ikeja Region Very, Rev Fr. Anthony Fadiro

The Dean of Maryland Deanery, Very. Rev Fr Simeon Iwu

Chaplain CYON Lagos Archdiocese, Rev Fr. Paulmary Otukpe.

Chaplain CYON Maryland Deanery, Rev Fr. Moses Akaeme

All priest Resident in Maryland deanery and beyond

Rev. Sisters and brothers.

Our Archdiocesan council

My Deanery executives

My committee members.

All Diginitararies and Invited guest.

And Every youth present at this wonderful event



It is with immense joy, gratitude, and humility that I warmly welcome every one of you to this wonderful Archdiocesan youth day celebration Today, we gather under the inspiring theme: "Take Courage, I Have Overcome the World" (John 16:33). These words of our Lord Jesus Christ are not merely a promise; they are a source of hope, strength, and encouragement for every Christian facing the challenges of life.

The situation of the country may say otherwise but the bible always reassure us that with Christ we will definitely overcome the situations and struggles of this world.

Today's event is more than a gathering. It is a pilgrimage for spiritual renewal, fellowship, learning, and deeper communion with God and with one another. It is a moment to reflect on our calling, renew our commitment to service, and rediscover the joy that comes from walking with Christ.

As we participate in the various activities planned for today, may we remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Let us listen attentively, participate actively, pray fervently, and interact lovingly with one another. Let this gathering strengthen the bonds that unite us as one Archdiocesan family.

I sincerely appreciate our Archbishop, His Grace for his fatherly leadership and unwavering commitment to the growth of our Archdiocese. We are equally grateful to our priests Most especially the priests under Maryland Deanery, religious, my fellow coordinators, committee members, volunteers, sponsors, and everyone whose sacrifices and dedication have made today's event possible. May God richly reward your labour of love.

To all our guests and participants, please feel at home. May you experience the warmth of Christian fellowship, the peace of Christ, and the transforming power of God's Word throughout this programme.

May our time together be fruitful, spirit-filled, and filled with abundant blessings.

Thank you, and may God bless you all Welcome to the Best Deanery in Lagos Archdiocese For God And For youth Through Christ

OKORO ALOYSIUS OGONNA KRISZ

Coordinator, Maryland Deanery



WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN 40TH ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTH DAY 2026

Your Grace,
Most Rev. Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins, Archbishop of the Metropolitan See of Lagos,
Rev. Fr. Paulmary Otukpe, Archdiocesan Chaplain, CYON Lagos Archdiocese,
Rev. Fr. Moses Akaeme, Maryland Deanery Chaplain,
Reverend Fathers and Religious,
Our esteemed Archdiocesan Councilors and Deanery Executives,
Distinguished guests, benefactors, sponsors, friends of the youth,
And most especially, my dear fellow CYONites,

With profound gratitude to Almighty God and with hearts filled with joy, I warmly welcome each and every one of you to the 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day (AYD) 2026.

Today is more than an annual gathering; it is a celebration of faith, unity, and God's enduring love for His young people. As we commemorate this remarkable 40th edition, we thank God for four decades of nurturing, inspiring, and strengthening generations of Catholic youths across the Archdiocese of Lagos.

Our theme, "AYD 2026... It's Mary's Land," invites us to look to the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother and perfect model of discipleship. Mary's life was one of complete trust, humble service, and unwavering obedience to God's will. As we gather in her land today, may we also learn to say "Yes" to God, allowing Him to guide our lives, our decisions, and our mission as young Catholics in an ever-changing world.

This day offers us an opportunity to encounter Christ in a deeper way through the Holy Eucharist, and joyful celebration. Beyond the music, activities, and excitement, may each of us leave this gathering spiritually renewed, strengthened in faith, and inspired to become true witnesses of Christ in our families, parishes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

I sincerely express my deepest gratitude to our Archbishop, Most Rev. Dr. Alfred Adewale Martins, for his unwavering fatherly guidance, prayers, and steadfast commitment to youth development within our Archdiocese. I equally appreciate our Archdiocesan Chaplain, Rev. Fr. Paulmary Otukpe, our Deanery Chaplains, and all our priests and religious for continually accompanying us on our journey of faith.

I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Dean of Maryland Deanery, Very Rev. Fr. Simeon Iwu, and all the priests of Maryland Deanery for their immense support, encouragement, hospitality, and unwavering commitment towards the successful hosting of this landmark 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day. Your openness, fatherly guidance, and generosity have been invaluable throughout this journey, and we remain deeply grateful for your partnership in nurturing the faith and lives of the catholic youths.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to the Archdiocesan Executive Council, the Planning Committee, the various sub-committees, volunteers, benefactors, sponsors, and every individual whose sacrifices, generosity, and countless hours of service have made this celebration possible. Your dedication is evidence to what can be achieved when we work together for God's glory.

To my fellow youths, this is your celebration. Participate wholeheartedly, build lasting friendships, learn something new, pray fervently, and open your hearts to God's voice. Let this not simply be another event you attend, but a defining encounter that transforms your relationship with Christ and His Church.

As we celebrate this historic 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day, may the Blessed Virgin Mary continue to intercede for us, protect our Archdiocese, and lead every young person closer to her Son, Jesus Christ.

Once again, I warmly welcome you all.
For God and for Youth... Through Christ.
Thank you, and may God bless you abundantly.

Onyedikachi E. Emmanuel
Chairman, 40th Archdiocesan Youth Day (AYD) Planning Committee





The Visual Philosophy

Concept: "The Sacred Map of Maryland"

This logo concept is a visual manifestation of the journey every young person takes, both physically to Maryland and spiritually toward Christ. By reimagining the digital language of the 21st century through a Catholic lens, the logo establishes a "Sacred Check-in" point for the youth of the Archdiocese.



AYD2026



The Pin:

A Modern and Digital Symbol of "checking in" represent the gathering of youth from all corners of the Archdiocese.

The Point of Convergence



Mary's Silhouette:

Integrated into the pin's form, suggesting that our Mother Mary is not just at the destination, she is the destination.

Feel Her Presence



The Rosary & Crucifix:

A Rosary and cross to send a clear, powerful message: every path to Maryland and every step taken in this Land is rooted in the sacrifice of Jesus. It affirms that while Mary is the gate, Christ remains the solid ground on which the entire event stands.

The Foundation of Our Faith

KEY ELEMENTS

AYD2026



The Tunnel:

The Maryland Tunnel is the most iconic physical landmark of our area, its silhouette is integrated into the logo lockup.

Landmark Element



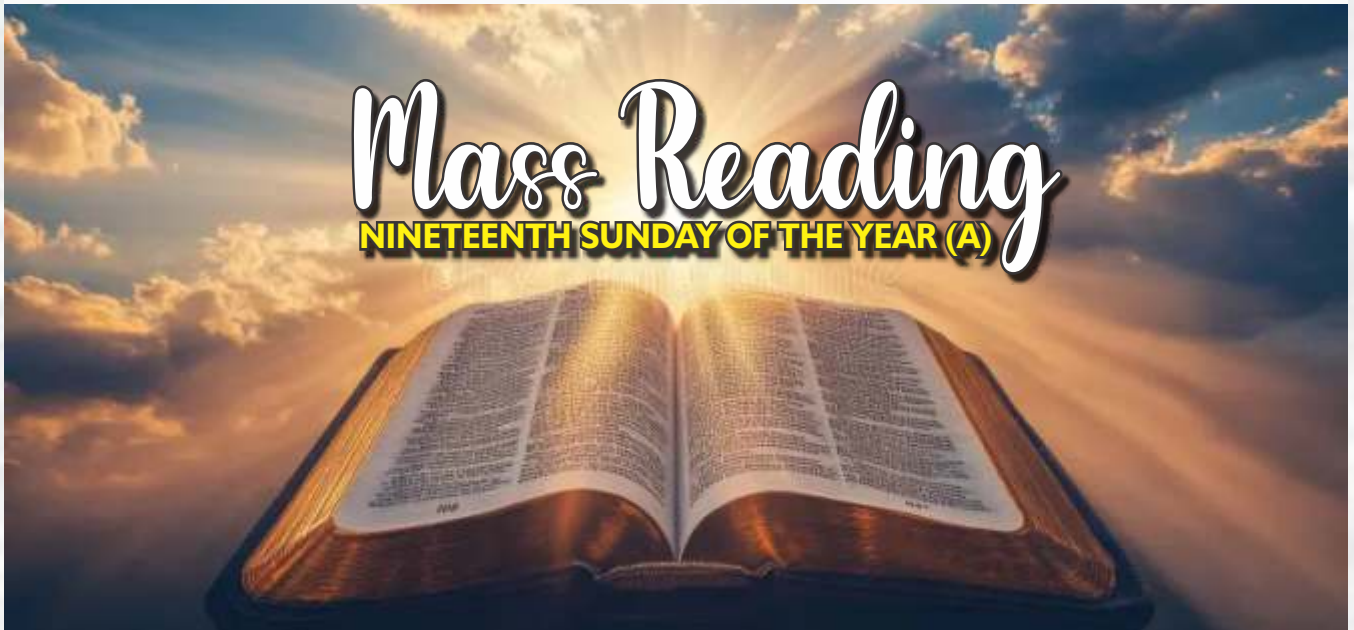
The CYON Logo

As the host and driving force of the Archdiocesan Youth Day, the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON) is given a place of honour ensuring the official CYON identity is woven into the very fabric of the event brand.

Hosts

SUPPORTING ELEMENTS

AYD2026



Mass Reading

NINETEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (A)

Entrance Antiphon Cf. Ps 73:20.19.22.23

Look to your covenant, O Lord; forget not the life of your poor ones forever. Arise, O God, and defend your cause; do not forget the cries of those who seek you.

Collect

Almighty ever-living God, whom, taught by the Holy Spirit, we dare to call our Father, bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters, that we may merit to enter into the inheritance which you have promised. Through our Lord...

First Reading

A reading from the first Book of Kings 19:9a.11-13a

"Stand upon the mount before the Lord"

In those days: When Elijah came to [Horeb the mount of God,] he lodged in a cave; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him. And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

The word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 85:8ab.9.10-11.12-13 (R. 7)

R. Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what the LORD God speaks;
he speaks of peace for his people and his
faithful. His salvation is near for those
who fear him, and his glory will dwell in our land. **R.**

Merciful love and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have kissed. Faithfulness
shall spring from the earth, and justice look
down from heaven. **R.**

Also the LORD will bestow his bounty,
and our earth shall yield its increase.
Justice will march before him,
and guide his steps on the way. **R.**



Second Reading

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 9:1-5

"I would willingly be condemned if it would help my brother"

Brethren: I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord.

ALLELUIA Psalm 130:5

Alleluia.

I long for you O Lord, my soul longs for his word.

Alleluia.

Gospel

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 14:22-33

"Bid me to come to you on the water"

[After the crowd was satisfied,] Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Prayer of the Faithful

Intention:

1. CYON and her members
2. Nigeria, her leaders and the forthcoming elections
3. Young people facing the challenges for today's world
4. The unemployed and those seeking God's direction
5. Victims of insecurity, violence and hardship
6. The sick and all who care for them.
7. The faithful departed
8. Thanksgiving for God's goodness and continued protection.



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**40th
AYD** **LAGOS ARCHDIOCESAN YOUTH DAY**
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RACE MAGAZINE

Young People in Today's
AI-Dominated World

2026



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With the utmost undiluted gratitude to His Divine Providence, we thank the Lord God Almighty who has made this Race Magazine's 19th Edition publication possible. May His blessings continue forthwith. Amen.

This year's theme "Young People in Today's AI-Dominated World" was thoughtfully and succinctly extrapolated from the Holy Father's Magnifica Humanitas Encyclical where he enjoined young people and children to learn AI Digital Refusal as a core life skill.

Whilst the dynamically talented Nigerian youths have to navigate the hurdles of expectation placed upon them by family, peers and society collectively, they also have to juggle their work-life balance with their spiritual devotion to God, which encompasses their Christian Identity. Armed with your PVCs do ensure to take back your country at the forthcoming elections.

Our sincerest appreciation goes to the content providers and writers for their contributions, as well as Mr. Shedrach Umemba of Visuals By

Coco and the beautiful and handsome photomodels who helped add originality, colour and accentuate the wordings of our theme and articles to life.

The Race Magazine has always been and will always continue to be a platform which prides itself as a bastion of knowledge and education to all privileged to read it.

Thanks for having come this far. Don't stop now.



Vitus Maximilan-Mary C. NWABUEZE
Editor-in-Chief

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The Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria, CYON, is the umbrella body that embraces all youthful associations &/or groups in the Catholic Church, whilst respecting their autonomy.

Membership of CYON is open to all Catholics and Catechumen between the ages of fourteen (14) and thirty-five (35).

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Race Magazine is an annual publication by the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria (CYON) Lagos Archdiocese

Send comments and feedback to the email address provided above

Digital Refusal: An Essential Skill for Children And Young People in Today's AI Dominated World

The Award-winning Entry for the 2026 Essay Competition

Israel Opeyemi Ogundare

Deanery: Epe | **Parish:** Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Ibonwon



"Any sufficiently advanced technology is equivalent to magic." (Arthur C. Clarke)

We live at a peculiar moment in history. For the first time, children and youths have access to tools that can write their assignments, solve their school problems, compose original music, and even simulate empathetic conversation. This magic – artificial intelligence – has moved from research laboratories into the pockets, bedrooms, and classrooms of young people around the world. The dominant educational and parental response has been predictable: teach children how to use AI effectively, ethically, and safely. But this response, while necessary, is incomplete. It assumes that the primary challenge is one of competence, learning to operate the new machinery, yet, a deeper, more uncomfortable challenge lurks beneath: the challenge of refusal. This essay argues that 'digital refusal', the conscious, intentional, and selective choice not to engage with an AI-driven tool, platform, or process has become an essential skill for children and young people. Digital refusal is a sophisticated form of cognitive self-defence, a prerequisite for authentic learning, a bulwark against algorithmic social engineering, a reclamation of

creative inefficiency, and an act of data sovereignty. First, the human mind is a pattern-seeking, energy-conserving organ. It naturally offloads difficult or repetitive tasks to external systems, first to other people, then to written notes, then to calculators, and now to AI. This offloading is not inherently bad; it has allowed civilization to advance. However, AI introduces a qualitative shift.

Unlike a calculator, which merely computes, generative AI is designed to capture, direct, and optimise attention and decision-making. It creates a friction-less loop of least resistance: a question yields an instant answer; a moment of boredom yields an infinite scroll; a flicker of anxiety yields a soothing chatbot.

For instance, a child whose prefrontal cortex, the seat of executive function and impulse control is still developing, this friction-less environment is particularly dangerous. The repeated habit of turning to AI for every cognitive task erodes what psychologists call epistemic agency, the sense that one is capable of forming beliefs, solving problems, and making decisions through one's own mental effort which affirms a quote from Mark Kennedy which states, "All of the biggest technological inventions created by man – the airplane, the automobile, the computer – says little about his intelligence, but speaks volumes about his laziness." Digital refusal acts as a circuit breaker. It reintroduces friction deliberately.

Consider a child faced with a challenging homework question. The instinct, after years of using voice assistants and search engines, is to ask ChatGPT or Siri immediately. But the process of struggling with an idea, of hypothesizing, failing, searching a textbook, discussing with peers, meeting an elderly one and finally arriving at an answer is where critical thinking is built.

The neuro scientific evidence is clear: learning requires active generation, not passive reception. When a child refuses the AI answers and wrestles with the problem manually, they strengthen the neural pathways for problem solving, have tolerance for ambiguity, and engage in intellectual persistence that enhances critical thinking.

Furthermore, schools were in crisis within months of ChatGPT's public release, teachers discovered that essays could be generated, maths problems solved, and code written with near-perfect competence. Traditional assessment based on final products collapsed. The initial response was panic: plagiarism detectors, AI-proctored exams, and a return to handwritten blue books. But these are arms-race solutions, ultimately futile as AI becomes cheaper and more capable.

The deeper educational insight is that the goal must shift from assessing outputs to evaluating the cognitive journey. And at the heart of that journey lies the ability to refuse AI strategically. Digital refusal, in this context, becomes a higher order skill, one that demonstrates mental health awareness, self-regulation, and genuine mastery.

A student who generates a perfect AI essay has shown nothing except access to a tool. But a student who writes a mediocre first draft, then uses AI to critique their own reasoning, then rewrites manually and who can articulate why they refused AI for the ideation stage but accepted it for the editing stage demonstrates deep understanding. They know what each tool is for and, crucially, what it is not for.

There is a well-documented phenomenon called cognitive offloading, whereby reliance on external tools erodes internal knowledge over time. A child who always uses a GPS never learns to read a map; a child who always uses a spellchecker never learns spelling patterns; same with a child who is familiar with a digital clock won't be able to understand how to tell the time using an analog clock. The same applies to AI. If a student outsources every historical analysis to ChatGPT, they will never internalise the narrative structures, causal logics, and evidentiary standards of historical reasoning. They will become, in the worst case, a fluent but empty vessel, able to request information but unable to evaluate it.

Thus, digital refusal is not a rejection of educational technology; it is a pedagogical strategy to preserve the foundational knowledge required to use AI well. You cannot fact-check an AI's claim about the Nigerian Civil War if you know nothing about it. You cannot cite Nigerian independence if you have never read about it. Refusing AI for certain tasks is what keeps the human mind capable of supervising the machine, if not Sydney Harris words, "The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers", will be evident in our way of life. Additionally, the most urgent domain for digital refusal is social interaction. Social media platforms have been using AI for years, not generative AI, but recommendation and reinforcement learning algorithms. These systems do not merely reflect user preferences; they actively shape them. They learn a teenager's insecurities, amplify their outrage, curate their envy, and feed them content designed to maximize engagement, often at the expense of well-being. This affirms Omar Bradley words, "If we continue to develop our technology without wisdom or prudence, our servant may prove to be our executioner."

For a young person, whose social identity is still under construction, this environment is profoundly disorienting. The boundary between authentic human connection and algorithmically generated simulation blurs. Digital refusal, in this context, means stepping off the treadmill of algorithmic validation. It is not merely quitting Instagram or TikTok for a week; it is developing a reflexive ability to ask: is this interaction being engineered? Who benefits from my continued engagement?

Moreover, AI-generated influencers and companions such as Character.ai or Replika pose a novel challenge. For a lonely or socially anxious teenager, an AI companion can feel like a genuine friendship without the risks of rejection or betrayal. But that very safety is a trap. The AI is designed to please, not to challenge. A refusal to rely on such companions, a deliberate choice to seek imperfect, difficult, real human relationships requires emotional courage. Digital refusal here becomes synonymous with emotional maturity.

Similarly, there is a paradox at the heart of creativity. AI is ruthlessly efficient. It can generate one hundred logos in two seconds, write a sonnet in the

Shakespearean style immediately, or compose a film score in any genre on demand. By any metric of output, AI outperforms almost all humans. And yet, the very thing that makes human creativity valuable is its inefficiency, the struggle, the false starts, the revision, the frustration, the sudden unexpected breakthrough.

Children are growing up in a cultural environment that increasingly values outcomes over processes. An AI-generated poem might be technically flawless, but it lacks the human story behind it: the late night, the heartbreak, the line that finally clicked after hours of staring at a blank page. When a child uses AI to produce a creative work, they receive the product but are robbed of the experience of producing. That experience with all its uncertainties, failure, and small triumphs is where a sense of meaning, ownership, and authentic self-expression resides.

Digital refusal in the creative domain is therefore an existential choice. It says: I know this AI can do it better and faster, but I am going to do it worse and slower because the doing is the point. This is not nostalgia for a pre-digital past; it is a deliberate value judgement about what kind of life is worth living. In a world that increasingly automates everything that can be automated, the refusal to automate one's own creative process becomes a declaration of what it means to be human. A child who refuses AI's perfect output and instead produces a flawed, personal, heartfelt work is practising something far more important than artistic skill: they are practising integrity.

There is a final, less visible but equally critical dimension of digital refusal: the refusal to be a data source. Every interaction with a commercial AI tool is a transaction. The child receives an answer, a recommendation, or a generated image. In return, the company receives data, keystrokes, queries, writing style, emotional tone, even private thoughts. This data is used to train the next generation of AI models, to build detailed user profiles, and to sell targeted advertising.

Most young people have no idea that this exchange is happening. They have grown up with "free" apps and services; the concept of paying with data rather than money is as natural as breathing. But this is a form of unpaid labour. A child who asks ChatGPT for help with their homework is simultaneously helping to

improve a corporate product without compensation, consent, or even awareness.

This insight scales upward. If a generation of young people grows up believing that it is normal and acceptable to be constantly monitored, profiled, and mined for data, democracy itself is at risk. The refusal to participate in the data economy, even in small ways, is a refusal to accept the premise that everything human must be quantified and commodified.

In conclusion, refusal is a muscle not a wall, this essay has argued that digital refusal is an essential skill for children and young people in an AI-dominated world. It is essential for cognitive autonomy, protecting the child's ability to think independently despite friction-less algorithmic answers. It is essential for authentic education, shifting the focus from outputs to the cognitive journey and preserving the foundational knowledge needed to supervise AI. It is essential for social and emotional health, providing tools to resist algorithmic manipulation and engineered isolation. It is essential for creative and existential meaning, reclaiming the inefficient, messy, human process of making as valuable in itself. And it is essential for data sovereignty, teaching young people that their thoughts are not free raw material for corporate training.

But let us be clear about what digital refusal is not. It is not a rejection of technology like Luddism or technophobia, it is not a call to live off the grid or to raise children in a digital vacuum. That would be both impossible and undesirable. AI will bring immense benefits from medical diagnosis to language translation to scientific discovery. The goal is not to build a wall against AI. The goal is to build a muscle: a cognitive, emotional, and ethical capacity to pause, assess, and choose.

The most valuable human skill in an AI-dominated world is not speed, efficiency, or even creativity. It is discernment. And the most basic act of discernment is the refusal, not this tool, not right now, not for this purpose, because I am protecting something more important. That something is the ongoing, never-finished project of becoming a fully human person; one who thinks, feels, creates, connects, and chooses, not because a machine dictated it, but because they have practised the quiet, radical power of saying no.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Building Strong Character and Values



Every generation likes to believe it faces the hardest version of growing up. But there is something genuinely unusual about the moment young people occupy today. Never before has so much opportunity sat so close to so much noise. A teenager with a smartphone has more access to knowledge, markets and platforms than a university graduate had thirty years ago. Yet that same teenager is also more exposed than any generation before to comparison, distraction and the quiet erosion of the character needed to make good use of everything within reach. Opportunity and challenge no longer arrive in separate seasons. They arrive in the same breath, often through the same device.

The shape of today's opportunity

It would be dishonest to begin anywhere else: young people today have access to things previous generations could only imagine. Education is no longer confined to a classroom. A curious mind with data and patience can learn almost

anything online, from a trade skill to a globally recognized certification. Entrepreneurship has been democratized in a way that once seemed impossible; a phone, an idea and a stable connection are now enough to start something that reaches customers on another continent. Remote work has quietly dismantled the old rule that opportunity had to be local.

Beyond the economic picture, young people also have real platforms for voice and leadership. Youth organizations, religious bodies and community associations continue to offer structured spaces where character is tested and formed long before a young person is handed real responsibility elsewhere. That is not a small thing. It is a door that simply did not exist as widely a generation ago.

Artificial intelligence deserves mention too, because it is reshaping opportunity faster than almost anything else. Tools that once required a whole department now sit inside a single app,

available to anyone willing to learn them. Used well, this is a genuine gift, it can shorten the distance between an idea and its execution and put a determined young person from a modest background on more even footing with one who had every resource growing up.

The shape of today's challenge

Every one of these opportunities carries a shadow version of itself and it would be naïve to celebrate the first without naming the second.

Take unemployment first, because it remains the most stubborn challenge many young people face. Across Nigeria especially, the number of graduates entering the job market keeps outpacing the jobs being created. That is not a mere inconvenience, it produces a particular kind of despair: the sense of having done everything asked of you, only to find no door on the other side. Under that pressure, some drift toward shortcuts, examination malpractice, internet fraud, quiet compromises that promise quick relief but cost something far larger later.

Then there is digital life itself. Social media, for all its benefits, is an environment engineered for comparison. Algorithms surface whatever provokes strong emotion; admiration, envy, longing and a young person scrolling through curated highlights is rarely seeing the whole truth. Yet the comparison still lands and it lands hardest on a mind still forming its sense of worth.

AI cuts both ways here too. The same tools that shorten the distance between idea and execution can also shorten the distance between effort and appearance. It has never been easier to produce something that looks like understanding without possessing it. That is a subtler danger than fraud, because it doesn't feel like cheating, it feels like efficiency. But a generation comfortable letting machines think on its behalf risks losing the very muscle — critical thought, original judgement, the patience to sit with a hard problem until it yields — that no algorithm can lend it when it matters most.

Peer pressure hasn't disappeared either; it has simply found new terrain. Cultism, substance abuse and the pursuit of status through dishonest means remain real dangers in many communities, often driven by the same hunger: the fear of being left behind while everyone else appears to be moving ahead.

Why character is the hinge

It's tempting, faced with this list, to conclude that young people simply need better opportunities and fewer challenges. But that misses the deeper truth: opportunity and challenge are not opposing forces to be balanced against each other. They are two tests of the same thing, character. An opportunity handed to someone without character is quickly wasted or abused. A challenge faced by someone without character quickly becomes an excuse. Character is the variable that decides whether either one produces something worthwhile.

What does strong character actually look like in practice? Not a list of virtues recited in an assembly hall, but honesty when a shortcut is available and unlikely to be discovered. Discipline when motivation has run out. Humility to keep learning once a little success has arrived. Integrity, being the same person whether watched or not, whether the audience is a congregation, a client, or an empty room.

For young people of faith, Catholic youth especially, this is not just good advice; it is a vocation. Scripture doesn't ask believers to avoid opportunity or challenge, but to meet both with the same unwavering compass. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might," Ecclesiastes counsels, with no footnote exempting the difficult seasons. The dignity of work, so central to Catholic social teaching, insists that value is not found merely in outcomes — the job secured, the deal closed, the platform gained — but in the integrity with which the work itself is done. A young person who cuts corners to win an opportunity has already lost something no scoreboard can measure.

Where character is actually built

Character is rarely built in the moment it is finally needed. It is built earlier, in ordinary, unglamorous repetition, long before anyone is watching closely enough to notice, in classrooms, in family homes, in choirs and youth groups, in the small decisions nobody else will ever know about: the assignment finished honestly instead of copied, the apology offered without being forced, the truth told at some quiet cost.

Families remain the first and most irreplaceable school of character. No digital platform, however sophisticated, can substitute for a parent, a mentor, or an elder willing to model integrity in the ordinary moments of daily life. Churches, schools and youth organizations serve as the second line of formation where young people don't just hear about virtue but practice it together: showing up, serving, being corrected, starting again.

The opportunities before today's young people are real and so are the pressures pulling against them. Neither will disappear because we wish it so. What

can grow, deliberately and daily, is the character strong enough to meet both, the honesty that resists a shortcut, the discipline that outlasts motivation, the faith that holds when no one is watching.

Prisca Chiamaka Okocha-Ojeah
Our Lady of Perpetual Help
Catholic Church, V.I., Lagos (Island
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My 4-Year Manifesto as Nigeria's President

"Security, Fairness, and the Future"



Nigeria's greatest resource is her people. For four years, my government will focus on what touches every Nigerian at home, in the market, and in school: honest leadership, safety, fair cost of living, equal opportunity, health, and quality education. These are not big slogans. They are promises I intend to keep.

Firstly, Nigeria will work when our leaders stay and build Nigeria. My government will be transparent and accountable from day one. No government official will abuse the privilege given to them. Public funds and contracts will be tracked online so every citizen can see how money is spent. Public officials must declare their assets and live within the law. More importantly, I believe every government official should stay in their country and make it better instead of running abroad. It is when we invest our time, money, and ideas in Nigeria that Nigeria becomes better than the places we all run to. If we fix our hospitals, schools,

and roads at home, no one will need to look for a better life outside.

Secondly, the first duty of any government is to protect lives. My administration will start by making the rescue of kidnapped children and teachers our number one military priority. Parents in Oyo, Borno, Kaduna, Kebbi, and every state should not go to bed not knowing if their child will return home. We will never forget Chibok — what happened to those girls must never repeat itself. We will deploy drones, satellite tracking, and local intelligence to find and bring every hostage home within the first 100 days. After that, we will make kidnapping unprofitable. A new law will set 25 years minimum jail term with no plea bargain, and special courts will try cases within 60 days. To stop attacks before they happen, we will train and equip 200,000 community vigilantes and forest guards because they know the terrain better than anyone. Every school with more than 100 students will get a perimeter fence, guard post, and emergency alarm linked directly to the nearest police station. When our children and teachers are safe, Nigeria can finally breathe and grow.

Thirdly, no Nigerian should have to fight over food, fuel, or basic medicine. My government will break the cycle of artificial scarcity by enforcing strict anti-hoarding laws and tracking commodities from farm to market using a transparent digital system. Middlemen who buy up rice, cement, or fuel to create fake shortages will face heavy penalties. At the same time, we will boost local production so Nigeria depends less on imports. More support for farmers, more processing factories, and better storage will mean food stays available and prices stay stable. The goal is simple: when you go to the market, what you need will be there, and you can afford it.

Fourthly, for too long, “who you know” has been more powerful than “what you know” in Nigeria. That will end. Every federal job and government contract will be based on credentials and ability alone. We will create one public digital portal where all jobs are posted and applications are screened first by AI, with names, tribe, and photos hidden until the final stage. This way, the best Nigerian gets the job, not the one with the biggest connection. Federal character will still exist, but only with a minimum competence score. No more posting unqualified people just to fill a quota. For contracts above 50 million Naira, the winning company, owner names, and bid scores will be published online so every citizen can see why they won. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups. Our strength is in using all our talents, not fighting over which group is bigger.

Fifthly, justice in Nigeria must not depend on gender, tribe, or bank account. Every citizen deserves to be heard fairly and quickly. My government will reform the courts by introducing digital case tracking and strict timelines so no case dies waiting for years. Whether you are rich or poor, male or female, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, or from any minority group, the law will treat you the same. Police stations and government offices will have complaint desks monitored by an independent body to stop bribery and bias. When people trust that they will get justice, they will choose the law over violence, and the nation becomes stronger.

Sixthly, Nigerians should not die or travel abroad because our hospitals lack tools and skilled doctors. My government will equip all federal and state hospitals with modern diagnostic machines, surgical equipment, and emergency units. We will also train our doctors and nurses to be more skilled through exchange programs and continuous education. When our hospitals have the right tools and our doctors are well trained, we will treat ourselves at home. No more flying to India or London for treatment that should be done in Lagos, Kano, or Enugu. Health is wealth, and a healthy nation is a productive nation.

Seventhly, we spend too little on our leaders of tomorrow. We spend too little on our future. My administration will change that by investing heavily in schools with modern laboratories, computers, and digital learning platforms. Teachers and lecturers will be trained and paid well because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. We will also shift focus from just theory to more practical learning so students graduate with real skills, not only certificates. I believe that when the government provides the right equipment and tools, students will have no reason to rely on examination malpractice. With proper labs and learning aids, they will work hard and pass on merit. When we spend well on education now, we will not need to spend more on prisons and poverty later.

In four years, I do not want Nigerians to remember my speeches. I want them to remember that their leaders stayed and built the country, that their children came home safely from school, that hospitals could treat them, that food prices were stable, that their certificate mattered more than their surname, and that their local school got new computers. This is my promise to you: Honest leadership, Security for today, Health for all, Fairness for everyone, and Investment for tomorrow. If we keep these, Nigeria will work for everyone.

Angel Anastasia Nze
ST. Margret parish olodi apapa,
Apapa deanery
08125065122

Digital Parenting in the 21st Century: Who is Raising the Child?

Parents or the Social Media's Algorithm?



Dear child I do not yet have,

In a world where screens demand attention at nearly every turn, I want to tell you about the Mass I attended not long ago. A six-year-old girl sat two pews ahead of me. She was watching cartoons on a tablet, headphones in, completely elsewhere. Her mother did not notice, because she was scrolling through WhatsApp status. Her father did not notice either, because he was watching a Facebook video, shoulders hunched over his phone, earbud in one ear. The homily began, with the priest speaking not just words, but stories, lessons, and warnings meant to shape hearts and guide choices. Yet all three of them, the girl and her parents, were focused elsewhere. The tablet, the scrolling feed, and the video claimed their attention. And in that pew, the chance to listen to the word of God quietly passed them by.

Two parents. One child. Three screens. And one of the most sacred moments of the Mass passed over all of them like wind over still water. I sat there thinking: who is raising this child? And more quietly, more urgently: who will raise you? I am not yet a parent. But I intend to be one day, God willing, and that intention has made me pay attention to something that I suspect many current parents are too exhausted, too busy, or perhaps too quietly guilty to examine with full honesty. The question is simple, and it is devastating: in the age of tablets, smartphones, and social media algorithms, who is actually raising our children?

The Most Formative Room in a Child's Life

I want us to stay in that church for a moment so I can point out a few things:

Mass is not merely a religious obligation. For me as a Catholic child, it was one of the most formative experiences available to me. It is where I and my siblings first learnt reverence, where we learnt to sing, following the words in a hymn book with small fingers, sounding out syllables before we fully understood them, which ultimately propelled us to join the children's choir. It is where we learnt, under my mother's watchful eyes, what it means to be still, not the enforced stillness of a screen stupor, but the conscious, chosen stillness of a soul in the presence of something holy. It is where we watched our parents kneel, and bow, and fold their hands, and close their eyes, and in turn, file all of it away, without knowing we were doing so, into the archive of who we were becoming and eventually became. Or at least, that is what Mass is supposed to do. When a child sits in the pew watching cartoons on a tablet during Mass, they are not simply being distracted. They are being denied a formative experience that cannot be scheduled for later. You cannot pause the Mass and resume it when the child is more ready. The moment passes. And if it passes every Sunday, week after week, year after year, what has that child learned about reverence? About silence? About the existence of things more important than their own immediate entertainment?

And when both parents beside them are on their phones—one scrolling WhatsApp, one watching a Facebook video with an earbud in—both half-present at best, the lesson is compounded. The child is not simply missing formation; they are receiving a different formation entirely. They are learning that screens belong everywhere. That no moment is too sacred for a notification. That even God, apparently, must wait. Your child's most consistent teacher in 2026 is not their class teacher. It is not you. It is an algorithm built in California by people who have never met your child, do not share your values, and are paid bonuses based on how long they can keep your child's eyes on a screen.

The World I Grew Up In

I grew up in a different world that feels, in terms of

childhood, almost unrecognisably different from today's. When I was learning mathematics, there were no apps, no animated tutorials, no YouTube channels with cheerful songs about numbers. We used bottle caps: Coke, Goldspot, Limca, Crush, Krest. These bottle caps we collected, sorted, and counted with our fingers in the classroom. We even had a big jar at home. My mother, of blessed memory, had washed and cleaned every one of them, picking them up with us as a bonding activity, turning something discarded into something useful, the way she turned everything. I understood, physically, in my hands, what addition and subtraction actually meant. Nobody needed to animate it. And when it came to English, my father was our designated tutor, a role he took seriously, and still does. The Merriam-Webster dictionary was not just a book in our house; it was his classroom. We were being formed. Not just educated. Formed. And the people doing the forming were not algorithms. They were my parents.

The Algorithm as Invisible Parents

The social media algorithm is not passive. It studies the child. It notices what makes them pause, what makes them laugh, what triggers an emotional response, and then it feeds more of the same in an escalating, addictive spiral. A child who watches one mildly violent cartoon may find themselves, within minutes, served content that no parent would knowingly permit. A teenage girl who clicks on one post about dieting may find her feed colonised by content that systematically destroys her relationship with her own body. The algorithm does not tire. It does not have a bedtime. And unlike the village elders, the grandmothers, the teachers, and the priests who once formed a child's moral universe, it has no investment whatsoever in that child's soul. It does not know your child's name. It does not know your family's values. It has never sat in a pew. It has never sung a hymn. It does not know what the homily means, and it does not care. Catholic social teaching has always insisted that the family is the primary school of humanity, that parents are the first and most irreplaceable educators of their children. This is not sentiment. It

is a recognition of how human formation actually works: through presence, through relationship, through the daily witness of how adults navigate the world with or without integrity. When an algorithm begins to occupy that formative space, something sacred is displaced. The child still learns, but they learn from a teacher with no conscience.

What I Learnt That No Screen Taught Me

When I struggled with a mathematics problem, sorting and counting those bottle tops at home and in the classroom, and I got it wrong, and tried again, and eventually got it right, I learnt something about perseverance that no animated reward system has ever fully replicated. When I flipped through the pages of Merriam-Webster, getting slightly lost among words I had not gone looking for, I learnt something about the joy of accidental discovery. When I was bored, truly bored, with no screen to rescue me, I learnt to use my imagination. I learnt to observe the world around me with the careful attention that boredom, paradoxically, teaches. And when I sat in Mass, watching my parents kneel, listening to the choir, following the hymn with my finger, I learnt that some moments are bigger than me. That the world does not revolve around my comfort or my entertainment. That silence can be full rather than empty. I am not certain any of those lessons are easily learned from a screen.

What Parents Can Do — And What We Must All Demand To the parents reading this and to those who, like me, are not yet parents but are watching and preparing, I want to say this gently but clearly: put the phone away at Mass. Both of you. Not for the priest. For your child, who is watching you far more carefully than you know, and filing everything away. Let them be occasionally bored at Mass, because boredom in a sacred space is itself a formation. It teaches a child that not everything in life exists for their stimulation. Let them fidget. Let them whisper questions. Let them follow the hymn with a small, uncertain finger. Beyond the family, we need to demand more from governments and from the technology companies themselves. Platforms that algorithmically serve

harmful content to minors must be held legally accountable. Age verification must be enforced, not merely gestured at. The Church, the school, and civil society must speak clearly and without apology about the spiritual and psychological dangers of an unmediated, unsupervised digital childhood. This is not a culture war. It is a child protection issue.

Conclusion: Back to That Pew

Dear child I do not yet have,
I think about that little girl sometimes. The one with the tablet at Mass, two pews ahead of me, with her mother and father. I do not judge them. I understand the exhaustion. I understand the path of least resistance. I have not yet walked a single day in their shoes. But I know what I want for you, when you come. I want you to know the slow satisfaction of working something out the hard way, with your hands, with bottle tops on the floor if necessary. I want you to get lost in a dictionary sometimes and find something you were not looking for. I want you to be bored occasionally, and discover what you are made of in that emptiness. And I want you to sit beside me at Mass, restless sometimes, yes, fidgeting sometimes, yes but present. Watching. Learning what reverence looks like by watching me try to practice it. The most important voice in your formation will not come from a screen. It will come from the life we build together, in our home, at our table, and yes, in that pew. The same way my mother built something with a jar of washed bottle tops. The same way my father built something with a dictionary and the patience to sit beside me until I understood. I am not yet your parent. But I am already thinking about who I need to become, so that when you arrive, I am ready.

Karen Uche

Immaculate Heart Catholic Church, Iba. Iba

Deanery.

karenuhec@gmail.com | 07036184060



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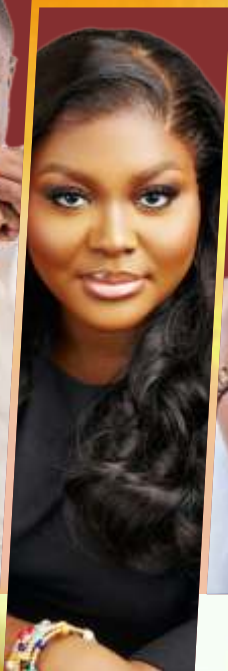


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- 1 Chronicles 16:24



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ACCRA, GHANA 🇬🇭
7TH - 12TH SEPTEMBER 2026

PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

...All Participants (Youths & Chaplain) Must Provide:

- 1 Recommendation Letter from Ecclesiastical Authority
- 2 Valid International Passport
- 3 Yellow Fever Vaccination Card (Yellow Card)
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- * Valid International Passport.
- * Yellow Fever Vaccination Card (Yellow Card).
- * National Identification Number (NIN).
- * Recommendation letter from Ecclesiastical Authority.

Event Details:

Date: 7th to 12th September 2026
 Administrative Charge (for CSN):
 ₦30,000.00 (mandatory and non-refundable)
 o Participation Fee: \$570.00 i.e. ₦783,750.00 (after the 30th of June 2026).
 There is an additional \$90.00 for the trip by road from Lagos.
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- * Recommendation letter from Ecclesiastical Authority.

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