



**MESSAGE FROM THE 5TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE REUNION OF EPISCOPAL
CONFERENCES OF WEST AFRICA (RECOWA) HELD AT THE HOTEL FLEUR DE LYS,
DAKAR, SENEGAL, FROM 5 TO 12 MAY 2025**

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you” (Jn 14:27)

*Reverend Fathers,
Brothers and Sisters of the Consecrated Life,
Sons and daughters of the Church-Family of God in West Africa,
Men and women of good will.*

On May 8, 2025, the universal Church celebrated with immense joy the election of the new Supreme Pontiff, Pope Leo XIV. This election is, in our eyes, a sign that the Church continues on its path faithfully, despite the storms. This continuity embodies for us the Christian hope that makes us feel that the Holy Spirit always guides the Church, even in times of uncertainty. We wish our Holy Father a fruitful pontificate.

A few days after this gift of a new Sovereign Pontiff to the universal Church, we, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, at the end of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Reunion of Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (RECOWA), send you our wishes for peace in the name of Christ Jesus, whose redemptive sacrifice and resurrection from the dead we commemorate at this Easter time. He is our hope, our peace and our salvation.

On this day, May 11, 2025, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church celebrates Good Shepherd Sunday, or Vocations Sunday. Therefore, we raise our supplications to the Lord of the harvest, so that He may call more workers into His harvest.

Sons and daughters, beloved people of God, the Good Shepherd is the Master and model of the Pastors of RECOWA that we are; he calls us, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of this sub-region, to follow him and to be good shepherds for you, his flock redeemed at the price of his blood.

1. The 5th Plenary Assembly

The 5th Plenary Assembly of RECOWA brought together 148 participants in Dakar, including 2 Cardinals, 101 Archbishops and Bishops, 27 priests, 5 people of consecrated life and 13 lay faithful. The theme of the meeting is: *"For a synodal and Self-reliant Church at the service of justice and peace in West Africa."* This theme is inspired by the Synod on Synodality and by the reality of the Church and the peoples of West Africa. For a week, we exchanged, listening to one another, while listening to the Spirit.

We saw and heard the suffering of our peoples and we decided to send you this message of encouragement and hope.

2. A synodal Church where all walk together in co-responsibility

Dear Sons and Daughters of West Africa, walking together and carried by the Holy Spirit, the Lord calls us in this time to renew our way of being Church: not as a fixed structure, but as a people on

the move, listening to the Spirit. It is in this synodal dynamic that we are invited to move forward together, united in diversity, carried by the same faith and the same mission.

Every baptized person is called to participate actively in the life of the Church. Together, we discern, we listen, we dialogue, not to impose ideas, but to seek God's will in a spirit of humility. Lay people, consecrated people, deacons, priests, bishops, we are all invited to cultivate within ourselves a concern for the common good. This is not a simple sharing of tasks, but a profound commitment to carrying out the mission of evangelization together, in mutual trust, complementarity, respect, and acceptance of charisms.

The Holy Spirit, guide of our path, invites us to leave our comforts, to overcome our divisions, and to build a fraternal, open and bold Church where justice and peace reign.

3. A synodal Church where gifts are shared among local Churches

Such a Church embodies a vision of true communion and evangelical solidarity. In this dynamic, each community, rich in its charisms, experiences, and resources, is not an isolated entity, but a living member of a single body. The sharing of gifts—whether spiritual, human, cultural, or material—then becomes a prophetic act that reverses the logic of competition and self-sufficiency. It is a call to support one another, so that the Church's mission may unfold in a manner that is more just, inclusive, and faithful to the Gospel.

4. A self-sustaining Church where resources are generated from within

This Church embodies remarkable spiritual and organizational maturity. It does not depend solely on external support or distant patrons to carry out its mission, but relies primarily on the concrete commitment of its members. This autonomy, which is not only financial, but also cultural and pastoral, aims to foster shared responsibility between the faithful and leaders, anchoring the Church in its local reality. It thus becomes free to adapt its pastoral, social, and economic action to the specific needs of its community. However, this independence requires a strong culture of transparency, virtuous management, and sustainable solidarity.

5. A peaceful and conflict-free West Africa

Such a West Africa cannot emerge without a collective will to prioritize dialogue over division, justice over impunity, and education over ignorance. Lasting peace requires the recognition of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity as a source of wealth, not a source of discord. It also requires strong, credible, equitable institutions rooted in local realities. By investing in youth, promoting virtuous governance structures, and strengthening regional integration, West Africa can become a model of stability and harmony on the continent.

The Synod's final document provides pastoral guidance for paying equal attention to the most disadvantaged and marginalized social categories: *“Equal attention must be paid to the composition of participatory bodies, so as to foster greater involvement of women, young people and those living in conditions of poverty or marginalization”* (Synod Final Document No. 106). It will also be a matter of fostering the empowerment of young people and women in the economic and social spheres, in order to strengthen their role in conflict prevention.

To promote a peaceful and conflict-free West Africa, here are some ideas, dear Sons and Daughters, men and women of good will:

1. ***Educating for Peace:*** We, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, urgently appeal to educators to integrate civic education, mutual acceptance and the peaceful resolution of conflicts more strongly into school curricula.
2. ***Promoting intercommunity dialogue:*** we invite you to create spaces for mediation and dialogue between ethnic groups, religions and social groups to diffuse tensions.
3. ***Developing an inclusive economy:*** For the attention of our countries' leaders, it will be beneficial for everyone to reduce regional and social inequalities by investing in marginalized areas to limit frustrations that can be exploited by violent groups.
4. ***Reforming the security sector:*** We are convinced of the need to train defense and security forces in respect for human rights and non-violent conflict management.
5. ***Fighting corruption, organized crime, and violent extremism:*** In order to clean up public life, we believe it is appropriate to call on governments to strengthen judicial institutions and oversight mechanisms; because crime is easily a result of corruption, and institutional corruption is a hindrance to any development. We also invite communities to welcome the poor, migrants, and victims of terrorism, and to promote fraternity and solidarity without borders.
6. ***Strengthen regional cooperation:*** It is important for us Bishops to call on the leaders of our West African sub-region to strengthen initiatives and the establishment of credible bodies capable of providing coordinated and efficient responses to crises with a view to greater regional integration. It is more than urgent to find the best formulas to put an end to the divisions and political misunderstandings between the countries of the ECOWAS region, which only serve to pitifully accentuate the misery and impoverishment of the populations, and delay any meaningful progress.

6. Ecological justice for all

For us, Bishops of RECOWA, ecological justice for all is based on the fundamental idea that environmental protection must not be at the expense of the most vulnerable. It requires a fair distribution of natural resources and accountability for the damage caused to the planet by our actions. There can be no true ecological transition without social justice, because ensuring ecological justice means recognizing that preserving the Earth also means preserving human dignity and the earth as our “*common home*.” Therefore, it will be beneficial for everyone to educate and raise awareness from a young age:

- Integrate ecological justice into school curricula;
- Organize participatory workshops in sensitive neighborhoods or rural areas;
- Support community media that highlight local environmental struggles.

7. West Africa, a region called to encourage a healthy way of governing in the Church and in States:

- *Promoting integrity through education and training;*
- *Strengthen institutions and mechanisms for control and accountability;*
- *Encourage civic and ecclesial participation.*

8. A call to conversion

“You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Mt 5:13-16)

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Brothers and Sisters of the Consecrated Life,
Sons and Daughters of the West African Sub-Region,
Men and women of good will.*

According to the final document of the Synod on Synodality n.11, “*the call to mission is inseparable from a call to conversion.*” In addition to all our positive efforts for a better life together, we, Bishops of the RECOWA, call on all, in these moments which seem to them to be a turning point, to be lights, however small, to illuminate our living spaces. For Christ is the light of the peoples, and this light shines on the face of the Church which receives from her Master the gift and the responsibility of being the leaven that acts in the bonds, relationships and fraternity of the human family. (Cf. *Synod on Synodality n.20*). And since one of the most frequented spaces these days is social media, it is important to invest it with the light of Christ for positive influences and the eradication of the weeds.

9. Gratitude

In concluding this message, we give thanks to Almighty God, the source of all wisdom, peace and fellowship, who in his mercy has enabled us to come together, to exchange, to pray and to work together for the good of our Churches and our peoples.

We pay a heartfelt tribute to the Head of State, His Excellency Mr. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, for the warm welcome, generosity and exemplary hospitality. We express our deep gratitude to the Senegalese people, and to all those who hosted us and put themselves at our service; may they be blessed. Senegal, the land of *teranga*, dialogue, faith and mutual acceptance, has opened its arms to us with sincere brotherhood, which honors the African values of unity and respect.

Our thanks also go to His Excellency Most Rev. Benjamin NDIAYE, Archbishop Emeritus of Dakar, to his successor His Excellency Most Rev. André GUEYE, to the Interterritorial Conference of Bishops of Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau headed by His Excellency Most Rev. Paul Abel MAMBA, whose constant commitment to the mission of the Church, pastoral unity and the promotion of evangelical values in our societies is a strong sign of hope for our continent.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the organizers of this Plenary Assembly of the Reunion of Episcopal Conferences of West Africa. Thanks to their discreet but effective work, we experienced intense moments of fraternity, reflection, and discernment. Their dedication and sense of service greatly contributed to the success of our meeting.

May the blessing of the Lord descend abundantly upon each and every one, and may our God and Father continue to make our Churches living instruments of synodality, peace, justice and reconciliation.

Done in Dakar, this 11th day of May 2025.



Most Rev Alexis Touabli Youlo
President of RECOWA



Rev. Fr. Vitalis Anaehobi
Secretary General of RECOWA

