

**PASTORAL CHARITY OF CHRIST IN PRIESTLY FORMATION:
THE KEY REMEDY TO PASTORAL PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Pastoral problems facing the Catholic Church in Nigeria today, amongst which are the rise in neopaganism, materialistic lifestyle among the clergy, social media addiction and proliferation of private and unorthodox prayer ministries, pose challenges to pastoral ministry in the country. Being aware of their obligation to be effective and fruitful in their pastoral work, Catholic priests ought to seek for a way to address such problems regularly. Recently, Pope Leo XIV, in his Apostolic Letter, 'A Fidelity that Generates the Future,' no. 24, admonishes priests to embrace pastoral charity as the paradigm for remaining faithful to the mission of Christ. In the light of this admonition and from pastoral-theological perspective, this paper argues that greater emphasis on the centrality of pastoral charity of Christ in priestly formation, both at seminary and ongoing formation, would help priests to consciously form in themselves the pastoral charity of Christ through which they can mitigate the pastoral problems in the country and be effective and fruitful in pastoral ministry, in fidelity to the mission of Christ.

Keywords: Pastoral Charity, Christ the Good Shepherd, Pastoral Ministry, Salvation of Souls, Catholic Priests, Priestly Formation

1. Introduction

The pastoral problems of increase in the number of people losing their Christian faith in Nigeria and falling into neopaganism² and social media

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²Paulinus Ezeokafor, 'I must Preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other Cities also...' (Lk. 4:43). An Address at Plenary Fathers' Meeting on 2 September, 2024. *Pastoral Imprints on the Sands of Time*, edited by Evaristus Ifeanacho, Fides Media Publications, 2024, 39

addictions³ have become topical in our time. Some other current pastoral issues include materialistic lifestyle and sexual misconduct among priests, as well as their unavailability to the people entrusted to their pastoral care.⁴ Another one is the growing problem of poor attendance of lay faithful to formative programs in the Church, as the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) reports that there is a ‘lack of commitment by the lay people due to socio-economic factors giving more preference to pursuit of their temporal goals.’⁵ Worth noting also is the problem of proliferation of private prayer ministries operating without the approval of the competent authorities,⁶ which CBCN bemoans in their statement that ‘these ministries often tend towards unorthodox practices, causing scandal among the faithful, thereby hurting the unity of the Church. Additionally, many of the priests involved in this trend become too distracted from their primary duty as pastors of souls.’⁷ These and other pastoral problems can be broadly categorised into two: those arising from priests, and those arising from the lay faithful. How can a priest mitigate these problems and be efficient and fruitful in his pastoral ministry? By imitating the pastoral charity of Christ, the God Shepherd.

Christ the Good Shepherd is normally depicted in an image in which he carries the lost sheep on his shoulder. The image accords with Jesus’ revelation of himself as the one who came to search, find and bring back the lost with a close bond. Jesus did so to the point of laying down his life for his flock. The three steps of searching, finding and bringing back the lost sheep with a close bond are borne out of his pastoral charity. Pastoral

³Lawrence Nchekwube Nwankwo, ‘The Pursuit of Silence: The Challenge of Seminary Formation,’ *Ministerium – A Journal of Contextual Theology*, Vol 11 (2025), 66

⁴Luka Markus Barau ‘The Challenges Militating Against Credible Lifestyle of Catholic Clergy and Practical Measures to Make Catholic Clerical Lifestyle Productive in Kano Diocese’ Ochendo, *An African Journal of Innovative Studies*. 4/1, (2023) 29-30

⁵Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Re-International Meeting for the Formation of the Laity: Report on Best Practices’ A Report to Dicastery for Laity, Family & Life, Vatican, July 3, 2018

⁶Josephat Ugo Umeogwego, ‘Private Prayer Ministries in Nigeria and their Catholic Identity,’ *Ministerium – A Journal of Contextual Theology*, Vol 11 (2025), 33-34

⁷Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), ‘A Call for Prayer and Action: Towards Repentance and Spiritual Renewal,’ A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in Auchi Diocese, Edo State, 29 August, 2024, no. 4

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charity of Christ is the virtue which characterised and propelled his actions for salvation of souls. Pastoral ministers are called to develop the virtue in order to be true representatives of Christ in their pastoral actions, always searching, finding and bringing back the lost ones.

Recently, Pope Leo XIV draws our attention to the necessity of pastoral charity in pastoral ministry in his apostolic letter, 'A Fidelity that Generates the Future,' where he reminds us of the teaching of Pope St John Paul II on the subject in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, a document that explicitly mentions pastoral charity not less than fifty-one times. Drawing insight from it, Pope Leo XIV admonishes priests to embrace pastoral charity as the paradigm for remaining faithful to the mission of Christ.⁸ In the light of this admonition and from pastoral-theological perspective, this paper argues that greater emphasis on the centrality of pastoral charity of Christ in priestly formation, both at seminary and ongoing formation, would help priests to consciously form in themselves the pastoral charity of Christ through which they can mitigate the pastoral problems in the country and be effective and fruitful in pastoral ministry, in fidelity to the mission of Christ. This entails following Christ, the Good Shepherd, in his excellent model of total self-giving and service for the salvation of the world, searching, finding, and bringing back the lost sheep with close bond. Sequentially, the paper explores the concept of the pastoral charity of Christ and pastoral charity in the life and ministry of priests; and then it discusses it in relation to the seminary formation and ongoing formation of priests in Nigeria.

2. Pastoral Charity of Christ

Pastoral charity of Christ is the virtue at the heart of his pastoral ministry, the inner driving force of love in him to save souls. Through it, his motives, decisions and actions were directed towards salvation of all mankind, searching, finding and bringing back the lost ones. The fire of love in him for his flock was unquenchable. He says, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends;'⁹ 'I lay down my life for the

⁸Leo XIV. *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*. Rome: Vatican Press, 2025, no. 24

⁹John 15:13. Biblical references in this article are taken from *The Holy Bible, the New Revised Standard Version*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1993.

sheep;¹⁰ ‘The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many;’¹¹ and ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’¹² These are indications of Christ’s burning love for his flock – his pastoral charity – directed unto their salvation. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* presents various moments of its expressions in the life and ministry of Christ, as follows:

He feels compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mt. 9:35-36). He goes in search of the straying and scattered sheep (cf. Mt. 18:12-14) and joyfully celebrates their return. He gathers and protects them. He knows them and calls each one by name (cf. Jn. 10:3). He leads them to green pastures and still waters (cf. Ps. 22-23) and spreads a table for them, nourishing them with his own life. The good shepherd offers this life through his own death and resurrection.¹³

From here we can deduce that pastoral charity involves compassionate feeling for the flock which underlies the move to search, find and bring back the lost sheep. The culmination of its expression in the life and ministry of Christ was in his laying down of his life for his flock, his total gift of himself for our salvation. In his encounter with sinners, he did not end up with revealing to them their sinful state, but went further to lead them to conversion. In such an encounter with him, Zacchaeus asserts with a contrite heart, ‘If I have defrauded of anything, I will pay back four times as much.’¹⁴

Since every pastoral work in the Church is the work of Christ, pastoral ministers ought to carry out their tasks with the same pastoral charity of Christ. The necessity of this virtue in any pastoral work is manifested by the fact that before Jesus sends his ministers into his vineyard, ‘he forms and strengthens them with his pastoral charity.’¹⁵ For instance, before commanding Peter to feed and tend his sheep, Jesus interrogates him three

¹⁰John 10:15

¹¹Matthew 20:28

¹²John 10:10

¹³John Paul II. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. Rome: Vatican Press, 1992, no. 21

¹⁴Luke 19:8

¹⁵John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 15

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times to be sure that the pastoral charity is grounded in him (cf. John 21:15-19). In this light St Augustine sees pastoral ministry as *amoris officium* (office of love) and exhorts, ‘Let it be the office of love to feed the Lord’s flock.’¹⁶

3. Pastoral Charity in Priestly Life and Ministry

Priests are ordained for the pastoral ministry of Christ. They are set apart and dedicated to continue the role of Christ the Good Shepherd in such a way that their entire life preoccupation and project is to save souls. Hence, pastoral charity is essential to the priestly life and ministry. In line with this, *Pastoral Guide* affirms, ‘The characteristic mark of the spirituality of the priest is pastoral charity.’¹⁷ More still, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* teaches that by the virtue of the consecration ‘brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit in the sacrament of holy orders, the spiritual life of the priest is marked, molded and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity.’¹⁸

To imitate the pastoral charity of Christ is indispensable in the lives and ministry of priests if they are to be true to their vocation. ‘The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the head and shepherd, is pastoral charity, as a participation in Jesus Christ’s own pastoral charity, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.’¹⁹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* further explains:

The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ. ‘Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ’s love for his flock.

¹⁶Augustine. ‘Tractate 123 (John 21:12-19).’ *New Advent*. Translated by John Gibb; edited by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701123.htm>> accessed 3 January, 2026, Tractate 123, 5

¹⁷ Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, *Pastoral Guide*, 20

¹⁸John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 21

¹⁹John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23

Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us.²⁰

In line with this, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* presents priestly celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God as that which is ‘at the same time a sign and a stimulus for pastoral charity.’²¹ Through it priests are ready to offer themselves totally without reservation to serve the flock of Christ, just as St Paul teaches that celibacy makes one ‘anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please Lord.’²² In the same vein, *Pastoral Guide* presents pastoral charity as a virtue that encompasses chastity and other virtues which are necessary for efficiency in pastoral ministry:

Pastoral charity is put into action and shows itself through zeal (cf. Rom 12:11; 1 Pet 3:13; 1 Tim 4:14-16), in a life of obedience, chastity and poverty in an attitude of humility and in a willingness to carry the cross, in imitation of Christ (cf. Mt 10:38; 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 14:27). Each of these virtues is a necessary aspect of pastoral charity as proposed in the gospel. Priests should strive to live them faithfully, so as to be convincing disciples of the Good Shepherd and to be available with undivided hearts for the pastoral work of the diocese and of the whole Church.²³

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council teaches exhorts, ‘Pastoral charity demands that priests, if they are not to run in vain, should always work within the bond of union with the bishops and their fellow priests. If they act in this manner, priests will find unity of life in the unity of the Church’s own mission.’²⁴ This teaching indicates that through pastoral charity priestly fraternity and collaboration is solidified. St John Paul II attests to this by saying, ‘Within the Church community the priest’s pastoral charity impels and demands in a particular and specific way his personal relationship with the presbyterate, united in and with the

²⁰John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23

²¹Vatican II, ‘*Presbyterorum Ordinis*,’ In Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, edited by Austin Flannery. Brandra: St Pauls, 2004, no. 16

²²1 Corinthians 7:32

²³Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, *Pastoral Guide*. Rome: Vatican Press, 1989, no. 21

²⁴Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13

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bishop.²⁵ Since priests are nurtured in the pastoral charity of Christ the God shepherd and are ordained to serve the flock after the examples of Christ, there is no doubt that their success and fulfillment in the ministry necessarily requires that they relate fraternally and work together in the bond of pastoral charity.

Pastoral charity makes priests excel in simplicity of life and develops in them the willingness to share their resources with others. Just as Jesus gave up everything for his flock out of his pastoral charity, priests are to make available their resources for the ministry. ‘A certain common use of goods, similar to the common possession of goods in the history of the primitive Church, furnishes an excellent means of pastoral charity. By living this form of life, priests can laudably reduce to practice that spirit of poverty commended by Christ.’²⁶ Even though pastoral charity involves making one’s material resources available for the needy, it is not limited to material support but transcends it. Pope Leo XIV highlights this by making reference to Blessed Antonio Rosmini’s insight that pastoral charity is not just material charity and intellectual charity, it is beyond them, it is ‘at the top, as an indispensable dimension of any charitable action aimed at the good and integral development of the person.’²⁷ It is spiritual.

Pastoral charity is for all and not discriminative. It is not meant to be shown only to a selected few but to everyone irrespective of their state or position in the society; nor is it only meant for a certain moment but at all times for all. ‘Just as all the Lord’s activity was the fruit and sign of pastoral charity, so should the priest’s ministerial activity be.’²⁸ Concerning this, Pope Francis exhorts, ‘In our dealings with people, we must not lose pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes.’²⁹ For instance, ‘pastoral charity requires us not to treat simply as ‘sinners’ those whose guilt or responsibility may be attenuated by various factors affecting subjective imputability.’³⁰ Out of their pastoral charity, priests are not to

²⁵John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23

²⁶Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 17

²⁷Leo XIV. *Dilexi Te*. Rome: Vatican Press, 2025, no 70

²⁸John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 72

²⁹Francis, *Responses to the Dubia Submitted by Two Cardinals*, 25 September, 2023, no. 2d

³⁰Francis, *Responses to the Dubia 2f*

bar people from means of salvation, but should always seek for the best way and opportunity to lead them to deeper encounter with Christ for their salvation. The natural outcome of pastoral charity in a priest is that his pastoral choices would be only of what helps in the salvation of souls. He would avoid making a choice of what necessarily leads people away from Christ, the Saviour.

With pastoral charity a priest understands that his ministry is essentially for building up the people for Christ and he cannot do so without being deeply connected with the people as *Pastoral Guide* states:

... priests must consider themselves as part of the People of God, dedicated to the growth of the community, with genuine pastoral charity, because they have been taken from the people and appointed to act for them in their relations with God (cf. Heb 5:1). They should constantly, therefore, pray for their people, recommending them to the love of the Father (cf. 2 Th 1:11); they should try to get to know them in the situations of their daily life, as a shepherd knows his own flock (cf. Jn 10:14); they should live among them as ‘brothers among brothers and sisters;’ they should accompany them on their journey of faith, going ahead of them with their example (cf. Jn 13:15); they should carefully avoid anything that might give scandal (cf. 2 Cor 6:3); they should give, along with their community, a genuine witness of Christian consistency; so as to provide a valid invitation to those who are far off and do not yet believe in Christ; they should take care not to distance themselves from the people because of their own status, which often seems to give them a higher rank in the social scale.³¹

Pastoral charity blossoms through devotion to the Eucharist. ‘This pastoral charity flows out in a very special way from the Eucharistic sacrifice.’³² Even more, ‘The priest’s pastoral charity not only flows from the Eucharist but finds in the celebration of the Eucharist its highest realisation – just as

³¹Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, *Pastoral Guide*, 5

³²Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14

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it is from the Eucharist that he receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a 'sacrificial' dimension.³³

4. Pastoral Charity in Seminary Formation

Pastoral formation for priestly ministry occurs in a special way in two moments: first, during preparation for priesthood through seminary formation; second, from the moment of priestly ordination till death, which is known as ongoing formation. The success of these periods of formation depends on the extent they help to form pastoral charity of Christ in those undergoing the formation.

As Jesus formed in his disciples his pastoral charity before sending them into his vineyard as his ministers, seminary formation should be designed to help candidates for priesthood learn and make Christ's pastoral charity their own, to become the driving force for their pastoral engagements like St John Bosco who is known for his burning love for the youth entrusted to his care, a good number of whom became saints, like St Dominic Savio. 'From whom did St Don Bosco learn this pastoral charity? From Jesus of the Gospels. It was Christ the good shepherd who showed him his mission as well as the methodology...: 'not by blows but by gentleness and love.'³⁴ In the same vein Pope St John Paul II teaches:

Pastoral study and action direct one to an inner source, which the work of formation will take care to guard and make good use of: This is the ever-deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus, which – just as it was the principle and driving force of his salvific action – likewise, thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of orders, should constitute the principle and driving force of the priestly ministry.³⁵

Going further Pope St John Paul II draws attention to the fact that developing pastoral charity of Christ through pastoral formation is a question of ensuring the development of not only 'scientific, pastoral competence and practical skill, but also and especially a way of being in communion with the very sentiments and behavior of Christ the good

³³John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23

³⁴Pathiaraj Rayappan, 'Pastoral Charity,' *The Salesian Bulletin*, 2022

³⁵John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 57

shepherd: ‘Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 2:5).³⁶ A very important way of developing the sentiments of Christ the Good Shepherd is by including in the formation program visits to hospitals, prisons, orphanages, the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, rehabilitation centers and any other domain of the less privileged in the society, as well as visits to those who have fallen away from the Church. This would help seminarians to be inserted into the real experience of the less privileged in the society and those afflicted with sickness, mental issues, disasters and other problems of life. The annual six-week apostolic work of seminarians in Nigeria is a special moment possible for such visits as well as some weekends when school is in session.

To achieve the purpose of molding in the hearts of seminarians the pastoral charity of Christ, such visits would be accompanied with biblical passages that reveal the compassionate heart of Jesus to his flock. When seminarians learn to be compassionate like Christ, they would begin to act like Christ in their behaviours and conducts. They would be moved in heart to be fervent in praying for the people especially the afflicted and the less privileged, and learn how to communicate with, and care for them, treating them not as subordinates but as equals, restoring their dignity – like the Society of St Vincent the Paul who serve the poor as their masters according to their rule.³⁷ This reflects the teaching of *Optatam Totius* that pastoral formation involves helping the students develop the attitudes that would make them ‘to open their hearts in a spirit of charity’ to the various circumstances and needs of people.³⁸

Pastoral charity entails also developing in seminarians the spirit of pastoral responsibility and maturity in solving pastoral problems. Formation program should be designed ‘to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, ...in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in

³⁶John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 57

³⁷Society of St Vincent the Paul, *Manual and Rule*

³⁸Vatican II, *Optatam Totius*, 19

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pastoral work.³⁹ This would require exposing the seminarians to pastoral methods of solving problems in the footsteps of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

A typical example of such method is pastoral circle method which is of four steps. The first step is insertion, a moment in which the pastoral agent enters into the socio-cultural context of the people to get connected to their experience of the problem and identify it properly. The second step is social analysis through which the causes and consequences of the problem and other details of it are explored for its deeper understanding. The third step is theological reflection through which the light of faith from the Scripture and the Tradition of the Church is shed on the problem. The fourth step is pastoral action plan, a moment of creating the course of action through which the problem would be resolved. In a word, pastoral circle method is a process through which a pastoral agent gets connected with the real experience of an identified pastoral problem, analyses it in order to understand it, reflects on it in the light of Christian faith and develops a course of actions that would lead to the transformation of the pastoral issue for good.⁴⁰ This process is normally repeated when a new problem arises. It reflects the pastoral charity of Christ who, by his incarnation and dwelling among the humanity, got connected with them and their problems with his compassionate heart (moment of insertion), understood their problems (moment of social analysis), reflected on everything in line with the will of the Father (moment of theological reflection), and made decisive decisions to liberate the people from their bondage (pastoral action plan).

A formation house, in order to succeed in forming in the hearts of seminarians the pastoral charity of Christ, ought to be a community characterised by the love of Christ. *Pastores Dabor Vobis* expresses this concern as follows:

The major seminary should strive to become ‘a community built on deep friendship and charity so that it can be considered a true family living in joy.’ ... a community molded daily in the reading and meditation of the word of God and with the sacrament of the Eucharist, and in the practice of fraternal

³⁹John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 58

⁴⁰Joe Holland & Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*. New York: Dove Communications & Orbis Books, 1983, 7-10

charity and justice; a community in which, as its life and the life of each of its members progresses, there shine forth the Spirit of Christ and love for the Church.⁴¹

This is in line with how Jesus formed his disciples, which should serve as a model for all formation houses. He formed them in his love before sending them into his vineyard. He made their experience of his pastoral charity to be a reference point and a guide in their love for others as he says, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'⁴² Since Jesus loved his disciples by serving them to the point of laying down his life for them, the more seminarians experience the sacrificial love of Christ in their period of formation the more they would be reflections of that love in the pastoral field. The most excellent moment for experiencing the sacrificial love of Christ is during the Eucharistic celebration, by participating in it fully, consciously and actively with a pastoral disposition of opening oneself up to become formed like Christ who offered his whole self for the salvation of the world and became a model for us to follow in offering ourselves as he did. 'It is, above all, in the Eucharistic sacrifice that they will find that *pastoral charity* that is capable of producing an irresistible zeal, with unity and harmony of life and activity. It is only if he is a man of the sacred that a priest can be also a man for others.'⁴³

5. Pastoral Charity in the Ongoing Formation

Everything said above is important not only in seminary formation but in the ongoing formation of priests, with adaptations where necessary. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* speaks of the ongoing formation as a moment which has pastoral charity of Christ as its core and defining element:

The heart and form of the priest's ongoing formation is pastoral charity: The Holy Spirit, who infuses pastoral charity, introduces and accompanies the priest to an ever-deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ, which is unfathomable in its richness (cf. Eph. 3;14ff.) and, in turn, to a knowledge of the mystery of Christian priesthood. Pastoral charity itself

⁴¹John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 60

⁴²John 13: 34-35

⁴³Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, *Pastoral Guide*, 33

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impels the priest to an ever-deeper knowledge of the hopes, the needs, the problems, the sensibilities of the people to whom he ministers, taken in their specific situations, as individuals, in their families, in society and in history.⁴⁴

The document further presents pastoral charity as that which guides the whole pastoral activities of the priest, making him to be connected with the real situation of the people in order to discover the most appropriate pastoral methods to adopt in handling issues. The document asserts that this requires formation that is not temporary but perennial:

This pastoral charity, as has been said, impels the priest and stimulates him to become ever better acquainted with the real situation of the men and women to whom he is sent, to discern the call of the Spirit in the historical circumstances in which he finds himself and to seek the most suitable methods and the most useful forms for carrying out his ministry today. Thus, pastoral charity encourages and sustains the priest's human efforts for pastoral activity that is relevant, credible and effective. But this demands some kind of permanent pastoral formation.⁴⁵

In this way every moment of the life of a priest is a moment of ongoing formation under the guiding principles of pastoral charity. With his closeness to the people and endless interest in their salvation, the priest becomes ever ready to make decisions that would be helpful in winning back to Christ those who are leaving the Church. Guided by the same pastoral charity the priest makes daily effort to do away with the pastoral problems that are sometimes associated with priests, like materialistic lifestyle, sexual misconduct and unavailability to the people. He addresses the problems arising from the people of God not judgmentally but with an interest in pulling them out from the problems, like Christ who came to search, find and bring back the lost sheep, proclaiming 'release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind' and setting the oppressed free.⁴⁶ With pastoral charity, a priest who is spiritually gifted would not found a private prayer ministry with unorthodox practices operating against the directives of the competent authorities of the Church;

⁴⁴John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 70

⁴⁵John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 72

⁴⁶Luke 4:18

they would rather be fully committed to maintaining the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church as we profess in the Creed.⁴⁷

An ongoing formation grounded on pastoral charity helps the priest be coordinated and avoid chaos in his life and ministry. Drawing from the teachings of St John Paul II, Pope Leo XIV exhorts that ‘pastoral charity is the principle that unifies the life of the priest. It is precisely by keeping alive the fire of pastoral charity, namely the love of the Good Shepherd, that every priest can find balance in everyday life and know how to discern what is beneficial and what is the *proprium* of the ministry, according to the Church’s teachings.’⁴⁸ This entails unification and harmonisation of all aspects of priestly formation, as *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states:

The path toward maturity does not simply demand that the priest deepen the different aspects of his formation. It also demands above all that he be able to combine ever more harmoniously all these aspects, gradually achieving their inner unity. This will be made possible by pastoral charity. Indeed, pastoral charity not only coordinates and unifies the diverse aspects, but it makes them more specific, marking them out as aspects of the formation of the priest as such, that is, of the priest as a clear and living image, a minister of Jesus the good shepherd.⁴⁹

6. Conclusion

Pastoral charity of Christ the Good Shepherd is the driving force behind his works of salvation. In their participation in the pastoral ministry of Christ, priests are called to embrace the pastoral charity Christ as the paradigm to remain faithful in the mission of Christ which involves searching, finding and bringing back the lost sheep and directing all pastoral activities towards the salvation of souls. In our time, greater emphasis on the centrality of pastoral charity is needed in priestly formation in Nigeria, both in seminary and ongoing formation, in order to help priests acquire the attitudes and dispositions of Christ the Good Shepherd with which they would be more competent in mitigating pastoral problems in the country and bear fruits in their ministry.

⁴⁷Umeoguego, ‘Private Prayer Ministries in Nigeria,’ 47

⁴⁸Leo XIV. *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, 24

⁴⁹John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 74