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Pope Leo XIV Urges Nigerian Christians to Unite Against Persecution: 'Set Aside Differences'

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Papal Knights and Strategic Engagements in Addressing Christian Persecution in Nigeria: Toward Coordinated Response."

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Pope Leo XIV has urged Nigerian Christians to set aside partisan political interests and denominational differences and unite against persecution. The call came through the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Michael Francis Crotty, at a three-day conference in Owerri. His message was simple: only a coordinated response will work.

Crotty delivered the Pope's message at the conference of the Association of Papal Knights and Medallists, held at Maria Assumpta Cathedral in Owerri, Imo State. The theme said it all: "Papal Knights and Strategic Engagements in Addressing Christian Persecution in Nigeria: Toward Coordinated Response." The knights had gathered to talk about strategy, and the Pope gave them their first instruction.

The persecution they gathered to address takes many forms. Christians in Nigeria face killings, violent attacks, discrimination, kidnappings and the destruction of churches. They are denied land to build churches on, and excluded from political and economic opportunities.

The Pope's call comes as the violence continues. It is not a message for a crisis that has passed. It is a message for a crisis still happening, in villages and towns across northern and north-central Nigeria.

Crotty was blunt about one thing: it is wrong to deny that Christians are specifically targeted in parts of northern and north-central Nigeria. The denial, he said, helps no one. Naming the truth is the first step toward answering it.

He also warned that the moment matters because Nigeria is heading toward general elections in 2027. A divided Christian community, he argued, will be easy to ignore. A united one cannot be.

"Set Aside Differences": The Pope's Call

The heart of the Pope's message is unity. He asked Nigerian Christians to set aside partisan political interests - the party loyalties that split communities - and denominational differences, the lines between Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal and more. Neither, he said, should stand in the way of a common defence.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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