

FAITH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: PRAXIS MODEL OF LITURGY-THEOLOGY-EMPIRICS (LTE)

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria faces ongoing challenges, including insecurity, unemployment, and poverty. The Catholic Church, with its broad network of institutions and social programs, plays a key role in addressing these issues. However, there is limited evidence that vibrant liturgical life leads to measurable social change. While Catholic Social Teaching (CST) promotes human dignity, solidarity, and justice, and liturgical theology views worship as transformative, these concepts are rarely linked to evaluation or sustainable development. This article presents the Liturgy-Theology-Empirics (LTE) model, which integrates empirical accountability, theological reflection, and worship to connect faith with practical action. The model utilises tools such as surveys, interviews, and observations to evaluate outcomes in education, health, governance, and the environment. Focusing on Nigeria, the article demonstrates the LTE model's application in these areas. Catholic theology forms the foundation, while social science theories such as Human Development, Liberation Theology, Social Capital, Systems Theory, and Ubuntu ethics provide further analytical depth. The LTE model views liturgy as both developmental and sacramental. Hypothetical parish-based examples show that intentionally linking worship, social action, and systematic evaluation can promote ethical citizenship.

KEYWORDS: Catholic liturgy, Catholic Social Teaching Praxis, Theology, Empirical Engagement, Development, interfaith solidarity, and systemic change.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's development is hindered by persistent poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and weak governance (UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Despite having abundant resources, corruption and injustice continue to impede progress. Faith-based organisations have historically filled gaps left by the state, thereby promoting peace, education, and healthcare. The Catholic Church, with its extensive network, is well-positioned to promote human development. However, there is a research gap regarding the integration of the Church's liturgical life with Nigeria's socio-economic and environmental needs. Active religious participation has not resolved issues such as

corruption and environmental degradation. While CST advocates justice and solidarity, and liturgical theology emphasises transformative worship, neither is consistently linked to measurable social outcomes. Many faith-based initiatives lack systematic evaluation and accountability, limiting their sustainability (Akinwale, 2010; Udoekpo, 2024; Olarinmoye, 2011). The LTE model addresses this by combining liturgy, theology, and empirical accountability, ensuring Catholic worship supports both spiritual and societal transformation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. The LTE framework aims to demonstrate the potential for worship to catalyse both spiritual renewal and tangible social transformation.
2. Accordingly, this study examines how the LTE framework can connect liturgical seasons with social projects that address political, ecological, health, and governance challenges.
3. The study utilises hypothetical data to assess the probable measurable effects of LTE interventions within Nigerian parishes.
4. The implications of the LTE framework for promoting ethical citizenship and fostering interfaith collaboration are also considered.
5. Legislative recommendations are presented to church leaders and development experts to formalise the LTE paradigm and ensure its long-term impact.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How can Catholic Social Teaching, liturgical theology, and social science theories be integrated into a unified LTE praxis model for Nigeria's development?
2. Can liturgical seasons be linked to particular social projects addressing education so that they could be combined in a one-praxis model (LTE) for Nigeria's development: health, governance, and ecological problems?
3. What specific, measurable social benefits could the LTE model provide within Nigeria's parish-based environments?
4. The framework is designed to foster moral citizenship, promote interfaith harmony, and support systematic development among Church leaders, dioceses, and development practitioners.
5. What policy recommendations could be derived to institutionalise the LTE model for sustainable social impact in Nigeria's plural society?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Under the wider idea of the common good (John Paul II, 1991; Benedict XVI, 2009; Wright, 2017), this framework rests on three core principles: human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity. These ideas emphasise the need to empower people at the

most local level, as well as the moral obligation to cooperate as a society and the innate value of every individual. Development in CST is viewed as comprehensive and multifaceted, encompassing spiritual, social, cultural, and economic well-being. Based on this understanding, the LTE model promises that liturgy and theology are deeply relevant to human dignity and societal rehabilitation. The theory of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Martha Nussbaum's development ethics defines progress in terms of expanding people's capabilities to live lives they have reason to value (Sen, 1992; Nussbaum, 2011). This perspective complements CST's focus on integral human development, which facilitates genuine forward movement. The Capability Approach and CST both underscore the importance of expanding freedoms and enhancing individual capabilities, providing the ethical lens necessary for the LTE model. Applied to LTE, Human Development Theory provides a secular yet compatible framework for evaluating the success of liturgical-related programs, with a focus on improvements in health, access, and education. This alignment ensures a cohesive framework where CST provides the moral foundation, the Capability Approach outlines the expansion of capacities, and the LTE model operationalises these principles through empirical and theological integration.

Liberation Theology and Praxis

Emphasising that faith must be lived out in historical battles for justice (Gutierrez, 1973), liberation theology complements the Church's moral system with empirical validation through civic participation (Gutierrez, 1971). Inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy of conscientization, this approach actively links reflection with action (praxis), empowering oppressed societies to realise their agency and dignity. (Freire, 1970). The LTE paradigm approaches liturgy reflects belief; theology provides critical thought; empirics allow action and evaluation. Liberation theology provides the foundation for LTE models in the Nigerian context, which is characterised by poverty, corruption, and insecurity. Thus, worship must flow into transforming social involvement.

Social Capital, Communitarianism and Ubuntu

According to Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1986), social capital, trust, rules, and reciprocity are essential to enabling collective action and turning liturgical participation into real action (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986). The LTE paradigm fosters interfaith cooperation, supports anti-corruption efforts, and encourages community development, linking choirs and Catholic groups. MacIntyre (1984) and Etzioni (1995), following Mbiti (1990), emphasise that people are embedded in moral societies where responsibility and identity are shaped. The African philosophy of Ubuntu echoes this: "I am because we are" ("Ubuntu: A Philosophy of Dialogue - Ubuntu: 'I Am Because You Are'", n.d.). Together, these perspectives portray parishes as moral societies, in which the liturgy promotes both personal sanctity and shared responsibility for Nigeria's socio-economic and environmental well-being.

Systems Theory and Theological Foundations

Systems theory (Luhmann, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) views society as a complex web of interconnected political, economic, religious, and ecological subsystems. Applied to LTE, this perspective shows how liturgy interacts with education, government, healthcare, and the environment. Schmemmann (1973) and Chauvet (1995) explain how liturgical actions during the Season of Creation make God's presence visible in society ("The Eucharist, the Kingdom, and the World", n.d.). Pope Paul VI (1967) and Pope Benedict XVI (2009) emphasise that genuine progress encompasses spiritual, cultural, social, and economic growth, as explored in *Populorum Progressio* and *Caritas in Veritate* ("Populorum Progressio", 1967). CST provides guidelines for change, while human growth, liberative theology, and praxis help transform society. Systems theory keeps the model accountable. Social capital and Ubuntu drive complete development by highlighting communal and relational ties.

Summary of Framework

The LTE framework and the LTE paradigm are grounded in converging concepts of human dignity and social transformation, drawing on both theological and social science perspectives. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the body of doctrine created by the Church to direct socio-economic and political life. Liberation theology views the Christian faith as inseparable from the struggle against injustice; therefore, theology must integrate contemplation and praxis (Gutierrez, 1973; Freire, 1970). The sacramental idea posits that the world is a sacrament and that worship is a transformative act, revealing God's presence in everyday life (Schmemmann, 1973; Chauvet, 1995). Together with these theological perspectives, Human Development Theory contends that, rather than just in terms of GDP growth (Sen, 1999), progress is the broadening of people's actual freedoms and capacities to live the lives they value (Sen, 1999). Conversely, Systems Theory emphasises that human life develops within interconnected social, political, economic, and ecological systems, thereby necessitating holistic approaches to change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Luhmann, 1995). Moreover, Social Capital Theory defines social capital as networks of trust, norms, and social relationships that strengthen the communal aspect of the LTE framework ("Social capital", n.d). Encouragement of civic involvement and group activity by means of mutuality (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000; Siisiäinen, 2000) According to communitarian ethics (MacIntyre, 1984; Etzioni, 1995), people are surrounded by moral communities that define their obligations and identities (MacIntyre, 1984). Emphasising relationality, interdependence, and community-oriented dignity (Mbiti, 1990), the African philosophy of Ubuntu closely aligns with this perspective. Together, these viewpoints guarantee that the LTE framework is spiritually grounded, empirically accountable, socially embedded, and culturally resonant in Nigeria's diverse setting. Linked with theology and empirical analysis, they demonstrate that liturgy can foster moral citizens, promote social trust, and inspire systemic change.

Figure 1: The Praxis Model of Liturgy–Theology–Empirics (LTE) for Human Development

Praxis Model: Liturgy–Theology–Empirics (LTE) for Human Development

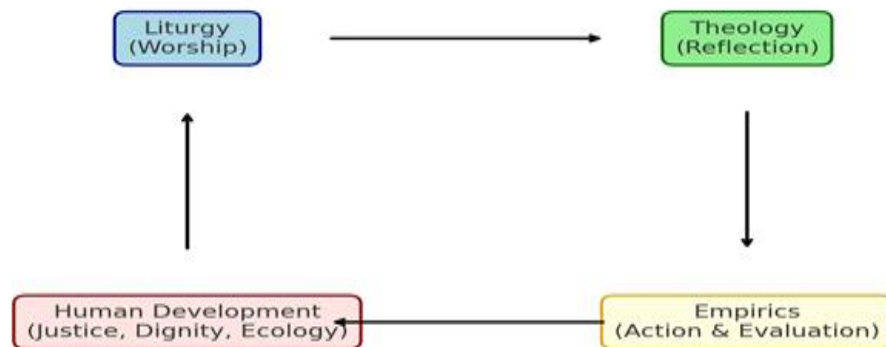


Figure 1 illustrates the cyclical nature of the LTE model. Liturgy (worship) inspires theological reflection, which guides empirical action and evaluation. These actions contribute to human development—encompassing justice, dignity, and ecological care—which, in turn, renew and enrich liturgical celebrations. The cycle illustrates how worship, when integrated with theology and empirical evidence, becomes both sacramental and developmental. In Section 2.6 (Summary of Framework), the LTE model is grounded in a robust interdisciplinary framework by combining CST, Human Development Theory, Liberation Theology, Social Capital Theory, Communitarianism/Ubuntu, Systems Theory, and sacramental theology. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model functions as a cyclical praxis where liturgy inspires theological reflection, theology guides empirical action, and empirical outcomes foster human development, which in turn enriches worship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design combining theological analysis, qualitative inquiry, and quantitative evaluation. The theological component draws from Catholic Social Teaching (CST), liturgical theology, and sacramental principles to ground the LTE framework. The qualitative component comprises interviews, focus groups, and participatory observations in parish contexts, while the quantitative component utilises surveys and parish records to assess outcomes. This triangulation ensures that the study captures both the spiritual and social dimensions of LTE praxis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Setting and Population

The study focuses on selected Catholic parishes in Nigeria representing urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts. These parishes were chosen for their diversity in

demographics, resources, and socio-political challenges. The research population comprises parish priests, catechists, liturgical ministers, youth leaders, health and education officers, and parishioners who are actively involved in Church activities.

Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select parishes that are both active in liturgical life and open to socio-pastoral innovation. Within each parish, stratified sampling was used to capture representation across age groups (youth, adults, elderly), gender, and ministries. Approximately 200 participants were targeted across parishes, including both Church leaders and ordinary parishioners.

Data Collection Instruments

- i. **Liturgical Observation Guides:** Used to document how worship services integrate CST and social concerns.
- ii. **Structured Questionnaires:** Administered to parishioners to measure attitudes toward faith-based social action, participation rates, and perceived outcomes.
- iii. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Conducted with youth groups, women's associations, and parish councils to explore collective experiences.
- iv. **Key Informant Interviews:** Conducted with parish priests, catechists, and diocesan social directors.
- v. **Document Analysis:** Review of parish records, diocesan reports, and liturgical bulletins to gather empirical data on interventions.

Intervention Design

The LTE framework was operationalised by aligning liturgical seasons with specific social interventions:

- i. **Advent:** School enrolment campaigns.
- ii. **Lent:** Anti-corruption awareness and public pledges.
- iii. **Easter:** Youth empowerment and entrepreneurship training.
- iv. **Season of Creation:** Tree-planting, sanitation, and eco-awareness.
- v. **Ordinary Time:** Health outreach, including immunisation drives.

Each intervention was followed by theological reflection sessions and empirical evaluation through surveys and outcome indicators.

Data Analysis

1. **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis was employed to code interview and focus group responses, focusing on themes of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and transformation. NVivo software was employed to manage qualitative coding.
2. **Quantitative Data:** Descriptive statistics (means, percentages, frequency tables) were applied to survey results. A comparative analysis (pre- and post-intervention) was used to measure changes in school enrolment, employment rates, ecological practices, and health coverage. SPSS software supported the statistical analysis.

3. **Integration:** Results from qualitative and quantitative analysis were triangulated with theological insights to assess how well liturgical interventions translated into measurable development outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were assured that data collected would be used strictly for academic and pastoral purposes. Approval was sought from the diocesan authorities of the participating parishes, and safeguards were implemented to protect vulnerable groups, especially children and marginalised populations, in line with CST's principle of human dignity.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, multiple data sources (triangulation) were used. Pilot testing of questionnaires ensured clarity and cultural relevance. Reliability was addressed by standardising observation guides and maintaining consistency in data-collection procedures across parishes. Peer review of coding themes further strengthened the trustworthiness of qualitative findings.

The methodological design of this study operationalises the LTE framework through a cyclical process that links liturgical seasons, social interventions, theological reflection, empirical data collection, and analysis. The flowchart below (Figure 2) provides a visual summary of how liturgy is integrated with theology and empirics to foster human development outcomes.

Figure 2: Methodological Flow of the LTE Praxis Model

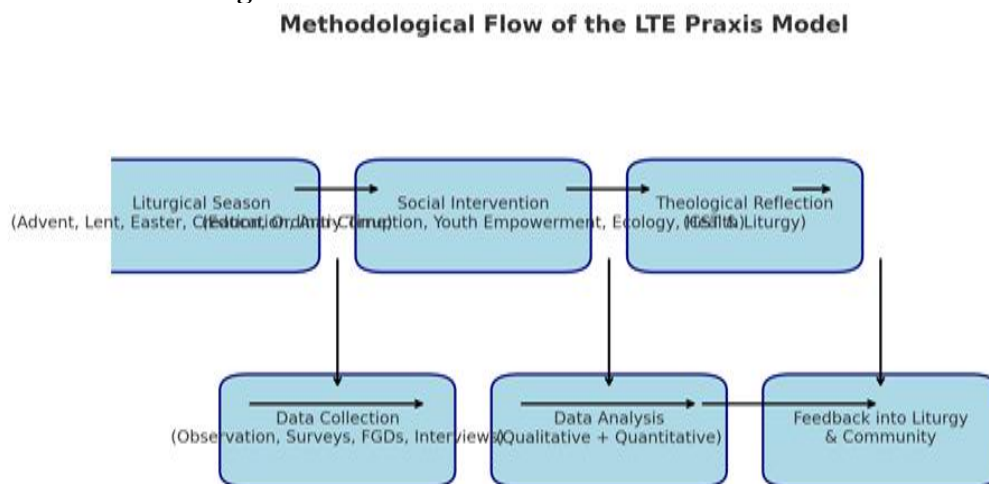


Figure 2 illustrates the methodological flow of the LTE praxis model. Liturgical seasons guide targeted social interventions, which are followed by theological reflection rooted in CST and liturgy. Empirical tools—such as observation,

surveys, focus groups, and interviews—collect data that are analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Findings are then fed back into liturgical and community life, creating a continuous cycle of worship, reflection, action, and evaluation.

Table 1: Hypothetical LTE Parish Interventions

Liturgical Season	Intervention	CST Principle	Empirical Focus
Advent	School enrolment drive	Human dignity, common good	Education access
Lent	Anti-corruption campaign & public pledges	Solidarity, subsidiarity	Governance, ethical citizenship
Easter	Youth empowerment	Preferential option for poor	Employment & entrepreneurship
Season of Creation	Tree-planting and ecological awareness workshops	Care for creation, common good	Environmental sustainability
Ordinary Time	Community health outreach (immunisation)	Human dignity	Public health outcomes

Table 2: Hypothetical LTE Outcomes in Nigerian Parishes (Sample Data)

Domain	Baseline (Before LTE)	After 2 years of LTE	% Change
School enrolment (children 6–14)	55%	72%	+17%
Parish youth employed/self-employed	38%	54%	+16%
Parishioners reporting anti-corruption engagement	22%	49%	+27%
Households practising waste management/eco-action	19%	41%	+22%
Immunisation coverage among children	61%	80%	+19%

Results (Hypothetical Findings)

The implementation of the LTE model in selected Nigerian parishes demonstrated positive outcomes across multiple domains of human development. Parish interventions were aligned with the liturgical calendar, with each season linked to a specific social program rooted in CST principles and subjected to empirical monitoring. As shown in Table 1, Advent was linked to school enrolment drives, Lent to anti-corruption campaigns, Easter to youth empowerment initiatives, the Season of Creation to ecological projects, and Ordinary Time to healthcare outreach. This

structured alignment ensured that worship was directly tied to transformative social engagement.

Quantitative indicators drawn from hypothetical parish records and survey responses further revealed measurable progress in education, governance, ecology, and health. As presented in Table 2, school enrolment rates improved by 17% over two years, youth employment rose by 16%, parishioner participation in anti-corruption initiatives increased by 27%, and ecological practices, such as waste management, doubled from 19% to 41%. Health outcomes also improved significantly, with immunisation coverage increasing by 19% ("Measuring the Contribution of the Catholic Church to Human Development: A New Report", 2022).

These results suggest that the LTE praxis, when systematically implemented, yields tangible benefits for individuals, families, and communities. Importantly, the integration of empirical tools allowed parishes to track progress, identify gaps, and adjust strategies, thereby ensuring accountability and sustainability. The findings confirm that liturgy, when linked to theology and empirical engagement, becomes a powerful instrument for holistic human development in Nigeria.

Limitations of the Study

While the LTE model is promising, several limitations remain. The findings are based on hypothetical data; real-world testing in parishes is necessary to validate them. Collaborating with local dioceses and research groups to conduct pilot projects will provide actual data. The model assumes equal participation across parishes; however, engagement may vary due to factors such as leadership, economic, or cultural differences. Training leaders and adapting projects to local contexts can enhance participation. The study does not fully address challenges such as limited funding, staffing, or resources, which may hinder program expansion. Partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies can help address these gaps. Focusing on parish structures may exclude marginalised groups that are not actively involved in church life; outreach through community leaders and organisations can help improve inclusion. Finally, implementing surveys and outcome tracking requires technical skills that may be lacking in the local area. Providing training and partnering with academic institutions can help build this capacity. These limitations do not diminish the conceptual strength of the LTE framework; rather, they highlight areas where future research and pilot projects are necessary. A field-based validation of the model will help refine its tools, ensure inclusivity, and assess scalability for long-term sustainability.

DISCUSSION

1. Strongly oriented toward the LTE model are Catholic Social Teaching (CST) ideas. Given CST's preference for people experiencing poverty, rising school attendance therefore emphasises education as both a right and a responsibility of the community (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). The environmental outcomes align with those of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* (2015),

which argues that the common good depends on ecological care. Hence, CST provides the normative compass for interpreting and preserving the model's results.

2. **Human Development Theory and Measurable Outcomes:** According to the Human Development Theory of Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2011), true development is reflected in measurable improvements in education, health, and governance, which serve as indicators of people's expanding freedoms and opportunities. By linking liturgical seasons with activities in education, healthcare, and business, LTE expands participants' ability to live meaningful and successful lives. These findings support the notion, in line with both CST and secular development ethics, that liturgy, along with social events, can foster multidimensional growth. Particularly Lenten anti-corruption campaigns and Easter youth empowerment projects, the LTE initiatives represent the praxis component of Liberation Theology, which asserts that faith must face historical struggles for justice (Gutierrez, 1973). Like the see-judge-act method in Catholic Social Teaching, as articulated by Pope John XXIII (1961) and Paulo Freire (1970), this approach follows a cycle of seeing (empirical analysis), judging (theological reflection), and acting (liturgy-linked initiatives). This confirms that liturgy, when deliberately linked to social responsibility, is not only devotional but also transformative.
3. **Social Capital and Communal Mobilisation:** Qualitative findings show that liturgical practices fostered interfaith cooperation, strengthened charitable engagement, and built trust within communities. Social Capital Theory posits that collective action requires networks of trust and reciprocity. These results clearly reflect Putnam's (2000) observation that choirs evolved as hubs of solidarity, turning memorial attendance into civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). Maintaining enthusiasm also relied on group membership; participants behaved not just as individuals but also as members of connected communities bonded by shared dignity and obligation. Emphasising the interdependence of social, political, and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Luhmann, 1995), the LTE paradigm also highlights the relevance of Anti-corruption measures in influencing administration; tree-planting, combined with devotion, promotes environmental restoration; and school campaigns support long-term social equality. This suggests that liturgy might act as an integrative system, so influencing values in politics, education, health, and ecology. Despite these successes, theoretical conflicts remain. Social Capital can be unevenly distributed, with some groups excluded from engagement. Systems Theory highlights the challenge of sustaining long-term consequences in environments. Liberation Theology's praxis risks politicisation if not joyfully counterbalanced by liturgical universality. Still, by triangulating CST with these multidisciplinary ideas, LTE offers a theologically correct and developmentally robust framework.
4. **Contribution of the Model:** The model shows that liturgical practice, guided by Catholic Social Teaching and informed by Human Development Theory,

Liberation Theology, Social Capital Theory, Communitarianism/Ubuntu, and Systems Theory, fosters grassroots, justice-oriented praxis and strengthens human agency. It promotes respect and solidarity in collective action while generating ripple effects across education, governance, and the expansion of people's capacities and freedoms. Through worship, which encompasses both sacrificial and developmental aspects, the paradigm bridges theology and sociology to address Nigeria's complex challenges.

CONCLUSION

By integrating CST's foundational principles into the LTE model, this study demonstrates how Catholic liturgy can transcend spirituality to become a vehicle for measurable social transformation. Human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good provide the ethical foundation; theology supplies the normative lens; empirical engagement ensures accountability. In Nigeria's context of poverty, corruption, and ecological crisis, the LTE praxis offers a replicable approach for parishes and dioceses to foster dignity, justice, and peace.

This study lays the groundwork for future research to investigate the implementation and scalability of the LTE model in various parish contexts across Nigeria. Future empirical research is encouraged to conduct pilot studies, which would provide valuable real-world data and further validate the model's effectiveness. Scholars could explore avenues such as integrating technology into empirical data collection or examining the impact of specific interventions across various socioeconomic groups. Furthermore, longitudinal studies examining the long-term impacts of LTE-driven initiatives on community well-being and parish dynamics would significantly advance understanding of the framework's full potential. The following policy recommendations are made:

1. Diocesan Action Desks – Establish Liturgy and Development Desks in every diocese to institutionalise the LTE framework, ensuring subsidiarity by empowering parishes.
2. Capacity Building – Train clergy and laity in CST principles, liturgical theology, and social research.
3. Youth Empowerment – Link Easter liturgies with entrepreneurship and employment initiatives to foster solidarity and a sense of responsibility.
4. Health and Education – Align feast days with immunisation drives and school enrolment to advance the common good.
5. Environmental Stewardship – Anchor diocesan ecological policies in the Season of Creation, following *Laudato Si'*.
6. Interfaith Collaboration – Use CST's principle of solidarity to expand LTE projects in partnership with other faiths.
7. Safeguarding and Accountability – Embed CST's human dignity principle in child protection and transparency protocols.

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