

Healing spiritual wounds

“We live in a society that is ravaged by war, banditry, kidnapping and bad governance with low earnings and high cost of living. These and more have made many people enter into psychological and spiritual depression,” says Fr Gabriel, who has been chosen by his bishop to head up trauma counselling.

To prepare him for his task he has started a two-year course at the Lux Terra Psycho-Spiritual Institute in Karen, Kenya where he will learn about healing troubled minds in a Christian context.

Fr Gabriel said these skills are vital. “Killings and banditry have lead many priests, Religious and lay people to fall victim to depression and despair, leading to psychological and mental trauma”.



Families that fled after the attack on Yelwata.

Fr Gabriel understands the problems only too well, having been at St Theresa’s Church, Katsina State when it was burnt down – twice!

ACN is supporting his studies to help heal a wounded nation. ✚

Will you help the Sisters?

Armed militia groups are descending on Ekwulobia, attacking farms, burning houses, killing men and raping women.

Attacks started in 2019, when armed groups set up camps in forests close to the town. With farmers terrified to work their land, families are starving and without medical care people are dying.

Many have fled their homes, but there is no displacement camp, instead people are trying to survive on the streets. **These internally displaced persons live in constant fear of attack, hiding in bushes, sleeping in abandoned houses and scrounging for food.**

The Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus work have been providing these internally displaced persons with vital support:

- Distributing food to 400 people a week.
- Visiting the sick and helping pay their doctor’s bills or providing medicines.
- Giving trauma and bereavement support.

But to carry out this mission of love, the Sisters are relying on a 15-year-old car that regularly breaks down. They urgently need to replace it – and have turned to ACN to ask for help to get a new vehicle so they can continue their mission of love. Will you help the Sisters? ✚



Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus distributing aid to internally displaced persons.

‘The organised, systematic and brutal cleansing of Christians’

“The militant Islamists attack with utter impunity – especially on our holiest feast days,” said Bishop Wilfred Anagbe. His words rang true when 47 died and more than 6,800 were made homeless during attacks in Benue State over Christmas 2024.

Father Isaiah Ter told ACN that attackers “burnt down the eight Catholic churches in St Mary’s parish, not to mention the parish house, clinics, schools and other houses. The parish priest and the assistant parish priest escaped and stayed in the bush for a whole day before they were finally rescued.”

Ongoing attacks on mostly Christian settlements across Nigeria’s Middle Belt have contributed to more than 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) across Nigeria. Bishop Wilfred told ACN: “Every day the population of widows and orphans grows. As I visit the camps where people are suffering such inhumane conditions, it is difficult to offer hope, but I will not abandon them.”

With help from ACN, the Church is assisting those displaced by the violence. Projects include:

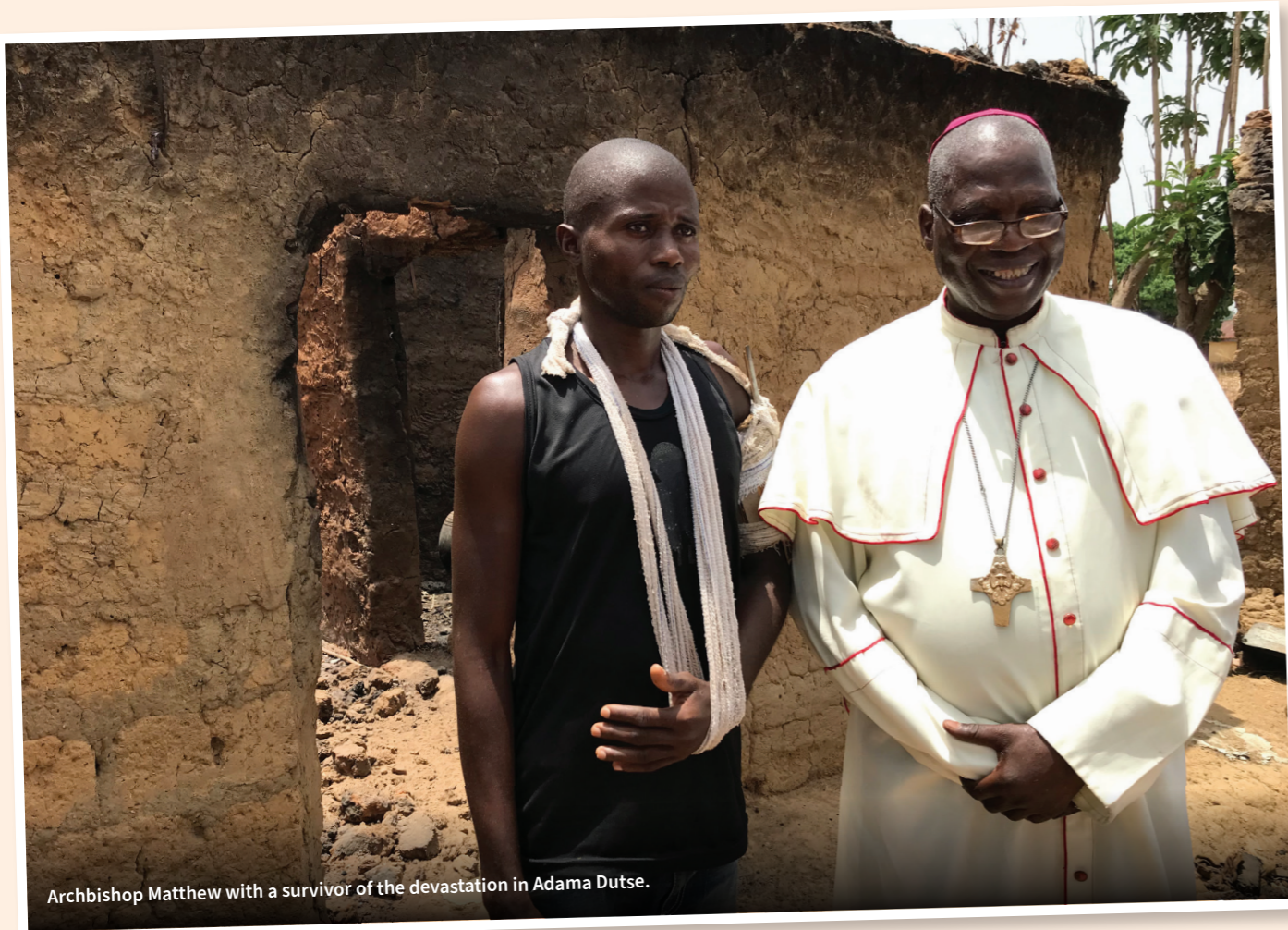
- Emergency aid for almost 500 displaced families in Benue State.

Archbishop Matthew Man’Oso Ndagoso of Kaduna visiting Adama Dutse after an attack in March 2024.

- Supporting Sisters in Anambra State providing food for 400 internally displaced persons a week.
- Scholarships to give displaced children an education.
- Training priests to heal trauma and dialogue with Muslims.

Bishop Wilfred said: “What is occurring in Benue State and elsewhere in Nigeria is an organised, systematic and brutal cleansing of Christians – they are unable to fend for themselves and [are] forced to rely on donations. We are relying on you to help us.” ✚





Archbishop Matthew with a survivor of the devastation in Adama Dutse.

Building bridges in the face of fear

Savage attacks by jihadists are causing relations to break down between Christians and Muslims.

The Church knows that it is essential to build bridges with the Islamic community, not only so that Christians and Muslims can continue to live alongside each other in peace, but also to prevent the growth of extremism, which seeks to obliterate Christianity.

So there is a pressing need for experts who will be able to lead inter-faith dialogue, which is why ACN is supporting Fr Andrew's course at the Dar Comboni Institute for Arabic Studies, Cairo, Egypt. When he finishes his course, he hopes to set up training programmes where young people can gain the skills needed for interfaith dialogue with their Muslim peers.



Blessing Ukertor in hospital with wounds to her hand and leg after her home in Yelwata was attacked. Both of her parents were killed.

Fr Andrew tells ACN that with the rise of Islamist extremism, "aversion and suspicion towards Muslim groups are spreading in our territories. **It is vital that we strengthen our efforts to ensure that relations between Christians and Muslims in our diocese do not continue to deteriorate.**" ✚

'I request your urgent assistance...'

The Church in Benue State has an emergency on their hands – and they cannot cope without your help.

More than 6,800 people from the villages in two parishes – St Michael's, Jato-Aka and St Mary's, Anwase – have been driven out of their homes in the Middle Belt. This has brought the number of internally displaced persons in Benue State alone to a staggering 1.5 million.

Fr Isaiah told ACN that the latest wave of internally displaced persons are not living in camps. They have been taken in by relatives, or sometimes strangers who have opened their hearts and their doors to them – "The bishop made a passionate appeal to host communities in Jato-Aka to accommodate these brothers and sisters".

But things are getting desperate, as many host families are fast running out of the food they need to feed themselves and their guests. Fr Isaiah said: **"The situation is dire, and immediate assistance is required to alleviate their suffering. I therefore request your urgent assistance to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters."**



Displaced families collecting food in Benue State.

The Church has drawn up a list of almost 500 households which need immediate help in order to survive. Basic food stuff including rice, beans, dried cassava, and onions will be provided. And where they are urgently needed, other essential items including shoes, soup and sleeping mats will be supplied.

But they cannot do it alone, so they have turned to us for help – please do all you can to help our suffering brothers and sisters in Benue State. ✚



Children in an IDP camp, Benue State.

Educating Nigeria's forgotten children

"People – including women and children – are killed almost every day. They are butchered. Those who survive run to IDP camps. Some have been living in camps for about 10 years. They cannot go back as jihadists are occupying their homes – and they have guns," says Fr Remigius Ihyula.

Fr Remigius told ACN that displaced children often suffer most, facing neglect and exploitation due to parental poverty and poor provision of basic needs – including education. **"In Benue State over 245,000 children had not gone to school since 2014."**

He added that since the crisis began schools have been destroyed, and "some have been converted into IDP camps, thereby reducing the number of classes available for learning."

But, with ACN's help, the Church has sponsored the IDP children who would benefit most, enrolling them in some of the state's best schools. The pupils board and are provided with books, pens, school uniforms and sports kits.

Fr Remigius said: **"The students are eternally grateful to you for rekindling their hope when all hope seemed lost. God bless you."** ✚

